

## **The joy of the joy of Francisco Cleudimar. A concrete experience of a transformative educational practice**

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### **First words: the scenario**

It is usually very difficult to find examples of very concrete practices showing the effect of what some would call transformative educational research. It is not easy because, among other things, it is not so usual to find a concrete example of “transformation”, specially when it has to do with a subjective transformative process. But when the example comes, the joy invade us. This is what happened in the story we’ll narrate in this article.

The pedagogical setting is the city of Pau dos Ferros, Rio Grande do Norte, the little princess of western Rio Grande do Norte. 5 hours by car to Natal, more than 2 to Caicó or Angicos we are in the middle of the Serido. It's hot, very hot! The clouds in the sky announce rain, but it doesn't rain. The air we breathe is regionally known as “stuffy”. Looking at the open horizon, you get the impression that the air is shaking. Inside the crowded auditorium of the Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA), we (nefianes) and the people present are crossed by the comfort of the air-conditioning, but also by the beauty and uniqueness of the events that unfold there: glances that shine, trembling voices ... they all face the challenge of narrating the event, the impossibility of being the same after an educational experience that has left indelible marks on their bodies.

This isn't the first time we've been to Pau dos Ferros, but this time we've come for the Pedagogical Day 2023, which has the theme "Potiguar Education on the Move: articulated planning for successful learning", organized by the 15th Regional Directorate of Education and Culture (15th DIREC) of the Rio Grande do Norte State Secretariat for Education, Culture, Sport and Leisure (SEEC/RN). We are at the start of the 2023 academic year.

Once again we are welcomed, cared for by the loving affection that reveals to us the meaning of being among (pedagogical) friends, as Aparecida expressed, moved after hearing Diná Mendes sing the Brazilian national anthem: we recognize each other as (pedagogical) friends because we suffer, worry and dream together, worried about the same (pedagogical) challenges and puzzles...

Maria Aparecida Vieira Diógenes is the Regional Director of Education for the 15th Direc, an admirable educator who coordinates public policy in this region with her heart and her whole body, involved... In Aparecida, anyone can feel the sense, the dream and the invitation to build an emancipatory education on a daily basis, like the arid horizon of the hinterland of the upper west of Rio Grande do Norte, trembles and makes our bodies tremble... We've come here with an invitation to invent other ways of inhabiting school time, school... An invitation to inhabit a childlike time, to seek beginnings every day... This is Aparecida's body-invitation... The collective quest to recover childhood in the school of adults...

### **One experience of philosophical literacy in Teacher Education in Rio Grande do Norte**

This time, on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, the Pedagogical Day of the year in question began. The day was programmed around three face-to-face meetings at the UFERSA campus in Pau dos Ferros. We arrived early on 02/02/23 and spent the whole day taking part in a memorable day full of affection, hope, love, dialogues, encounters, beginnings, questions, concerns... The program also included an invitation, and what an invitation it was! It was the graduation of literacy students from the "Supera Rio Grande do Norte (RN)" program..., which is part of RN's Policy to Overcome Illiteracy, involving 120 (one hundred and twenty) municipalities and a total of 687 (six hundred and eighty-seven) classes. In all, according to SEEC/RN data, the program involves more than 10,000 literacy students. Based on the principles of diversity, corporeality

and inclusion, as fundamental rights guided by SEEC/RN, each region in RN created its own project. In Pau dos Ferros, it was called “Supera RN” (Rio Grande Do Norte 2022).



*Image 1: auditorium of UFERSA, Campus Pau dos Ferros, 2/2/2023*

There we were once again, face to face with “Supera RN” ... We say “once again” because we were also present at the launch of this program in Pau dos Ferros in June 2022, when, at the invitation of the director of the 15th Directorate, Aparecida Vieira, we gave the program's mediators a 40-hour formation course in what we called “philosophical literacy”, inspired by the 40-hour literacy course for young people and adults coordinated by Paulo Freire in Angicos/RN in 1963 (see Lyra 1996). The formation in “philosophical literacy” had as its inspiring principles: lovingness, questioning, listening, thinking with others, collaborative work, critical resistance, equality, respect for differences, and childhood.

We were moved to tears, overflowing with joy, especially at the reunion with the teachers who, in the intensity of the welcoming embrace, in their emotion-filled voices, told us that the experiences they had during the formation period mediated by NEFI/UERJ continue to reverberate in their work in the relationship and search for connection with their literacy students.

The event was also attended, among other authorities, by Professor Maria do Socorro da Silva Batista, RN's secretary of education, Professor Liz Araújo, RN's sub-coordinator for Youth and Adult Education, and many municipal secretaries of education from the surrounding towns that are part of the jurisdiction of the 15th Direc, which in a total of twenty schools, have joined the "Supera RN" program..., school principals, educators, students from different places, both rural and urban. ... beautiful to see and feel that we were there, inspired by the experiences of the search to find a way of "making school", discovering in each literacy student "a schoolchild". The UFERSA auditorium was packed. UFERSA, it must be said, was created in 2005, as one of the 18 (eighteen) public universities created by President Lula's federal government. Specifically, the Pau dos Ferros campus was created in 2012 and is part of the 181 (one hundred and eighty-one) campuses that make up the policy of internalizing higher education. It's a beautiful, open, popular university... you can hear birds, you can breathe the atmosphere of study, it's inhabited with commitment and seriousness.

In the morning, the program proposed a dialogue entitled "Time and Movement in Potiguar Education", in which we peppered the auditorium with questions from those present in search of that condition of "inhabiting the beginning" which is so characteristic of the educating task (Horton & Freire 1990); while in the afternoon, at the beginning of the program, we were welcomed by Professor Priscila Cybelle's invitation to stillness, to look at oneself, to listen to one's own breathing. Priscila drew our attention to the fact that in the hectic everyday life of the world, we must find space for the need to stop, to slow down, to put our attention on ourselves so that we can perceive the other. The next panel on the program was "Philosophical literacy: amorousness in equality", which was mediated by the EJA sub-coordinator, Liz Araújo. Breaking with the theme's proposal, Liz spoke about the lack of love that permeates the school ground and which has excluded a significant part of the Brazilian population throughout history. Liz said that the current literacy students in Pau dos Ferros, who, for different reasons, have taken a lifetime to gain access to school, have been excluded and "unloved" by the school system.

As an example, she brought up a banner fixed to the front of a school announcing certain times and days, as well as a list of documents so that the EJA student could enroll. Our attention was drawn to the fact that the main criterion for returning to school is the will and desire to study. However, it is well known that, even though this is a right expressed in the Brazilian National Education Guidelines and Bases Law - LDB, Law

No. 9.394/96 (Art. 22), it is still a difficult reality for students to attend school due to the bureaucratic conditions imposed on them.

To close the day, we had the launch of the book *Uma viagem de sonhos impossíveis* (A journey of impossible dreams), which recounts the dreams of a traveler and his hosts on a 15,000 km journey, traveled over 100 days on the roads of the Brazilian Northeast, including Pau dos Ferros, to commemorate Paulo Freire's 100th birthday through exercises in a "childlike pedagogy of the question" (Kohan 2022). In order to reconstruct the memory of this very significant stage of the "journey of impossible dreams", the team from the 15th Direc. selected and presented fragments of scenes in which Walter Kohan interacted with educators on October 15, 2021, teacher's day, and as Aparecida said: "the presence of Professor Walter was the gift to the educators of Pau dos Ferros"; also scenes of moments in connection with the local community, in the sugar cane milling with the alfenim pullers on the Melancia farm.

This detailed account was read by an emotional Aparecida, while we watched the videos, through a text she wrote that was published in the book that recounts the trip (Kohan 2022). In one of the fragments of her narrative, she brought us a fragment from Paulo Freire to express what this "journey of impossible dreams" meant: "Wherever there are women and men, there is always something to do, there is always something to teach, there is always something to learn." (Freire *apud* Diógenes, 2022, p. 185).

### **A unique event in a philosophical literacy experience**

In RN, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE, there are 372.000 (three hundred and seventy-two thousand) illiterate people. The "Supera RN" program, run by the 15th DIREC in Pau dos Ferros, registered 937 (nine hundred and thirty-seven) literacy students, of whom 512 (five hundred and twelve) received their certificates on February 2, 2023.

As we said earlier, we went to Pau dos Ferros, a group of Nephians, in June 2022, for a philosophical literacy course that was the start of the "Supera, RN" program to combat illiteracy in Rio Grande do Norte, the same program that is now finishing a stage with the graduation of the first literate students. That initial philosophical literacy course for literacy teachers was preceded by rigorous work by the pedagogical team of the 15th DIREC to identify illiterate people through active on-

site searches; to invite them to participate in the program, trying to reawaken the desire that had been dormant due to the disenchantment of exclusion and the impossibility of studying; to select and prepare the literacy teachers and to create the conditions for the program to be effective. That week of philosophical formation for the literacy teachers was extraordinary in its attempt to experience principles that are sensitive to a curious and democratic literacy teaching relationship: we carried out exercises in asking questions, listening, thinking together, among equals, in a present time; we built a community of meaning for the “Supera, RN” project! The formation work continued, the specific stage of the literacy process began after the formation period, and in the ceremony graduated those literacy students who had reached the end of this stage.

It was a very exciting journey, the kind that gives you the strength to keep going and also makes you think a lot about what you do. How do we inhabit the school ground? As always when we are here in Pau dos Ferros (since 2021 we’ve been at least four or five times), there was the music and art of Diná Mendes... the infinite hospitality of Aparecida, the commitment of her work team to welcome people lovingly... and the emotional and moving joy of the alphabetizers and alphabetized of the Supera program, who came on this hot afternoon, also with their hearts warmed by Freire's hope and his political commitment to: “[...] the renegades, denied, forbidden to read the word, rereading the world” (Freire & Pelandré 2014, 14).

On February 2, 2023, the UFERSA Campus in Pau dos Ferros was filled with alphabetizers and alphabetizandos, coming from various points in the 20 (twenty) municipalities that make up the 15th region to take part in the Jornada and, in the case of the alphabetizandos, to receive their course completion diploma. There were various activities, conversations, and we collected many concerns, curiosities, questions... like, for example, an elderly man who said: “I never studied because in my day, studying was worthless”; or another who said with pride: “Now when I go to vote, I don't have to get my hands dirty anymore”.

Perhaps the highlight of the day was the intervention by one of the literacy students, Francisco Cleudimar. Francisco Cleudimar Bessa did his literacy training at the 04 de Setembro State School, in the municipality of Pau dos Ferros, RN, with the literacy mediator of the class, Adriana Batista, and Francisco Sormangem Damião de Assis, coordinator of the Literacy Mediators of the Supera program in Pau dos Ferros. All three were present at the handing out of diplomas. Francisco



Cleudimar introduced himself as a “screw” worker who is now literate... he said he had already mastered the screw, now he just needs to learn how to write the word “screw”.

He had mastered the screws of machines; he wants to master the screw of writing. He added that until now he had only been invited to the university to fix the screws on broken machines and that on graduation day, on the contrary, he was proud to be there, because he had been invited as a student; he was speaking to a crowded auditorium, something that was now possible for him because he obviously feels capable: “I am a student”, he said enthusiastically to the plenary. His broad, intense, genuine smile infected everyone with an overflowing joy. He received his diploma like someone receiving recognition, an opportunity and also an invitation to continue inhabiting a world that had hitherto been closed to him (and so many others in his class). He spent the whole ceremony smiling: he was enjoying a genuine day of celebration. While greeting Francisco and giving his diploma, Carlineide Almeida (Nefian) heard the following words from him: “Young lady, look where I am! One day I'm going to be a doctor.” To which Carlineide replied: “You're already a doctor! We're all doctors of something.” He smiled and happily said: “It's true.”

A short while later we discovered that Francisco is a doctor of screws and that soon we'll become a doctor on words.



*Image 2: Francisco Cleudimar Bessa, one of the students of SUPERA, RN, talking to the full auditorium of UFRSA, 2/2/2023*

We also felt overflowing with joy. We were already happy before the diplomas were handed out to the literacy graduates. The pedagogical week of the 15th DIREC had welcomed us with love and taken care of every detail, as always. We had the opportunity to open the second day in the morning, in a conversation that was delighted with the questions raised by the participants. We were moved by the words of Aparecida, the regional director of education, and Socorro, the secretary of state for education. And those of Liz and Priscila. However, Francisco Cleudimar's presence and words were particularly moving. He sounded like a child who was beginning a new life. He spoke like a child, from his heart. His words deserve to be listened to with care and love.

Let's pay more attention to them. Francisco Cleudimar presented himself as someone who has mastered the screws. He knows about them and can operate them to repair machines that don't work. What is a screw? Something that, if tightened, gives firmness, stability, security and that, if (loosened), releases, loosens, opens, gives freedom, lightness, movement. Francisco Cleudimar knows how to handle screws. He knows when to tighten them and when to loosen them. However, he doesn't know how to write the word "screw". Life has taught him how



to handle screws, but has prevented him from writing the word. He was thrown into one world at the same time as being expelled from another.

### **What does the joy of Francisco Cleudimar teach?**

That's why Francisco Cleudimar spoke like a child, with the strenght of a child, in the time of a child, at least in the words of Mia Couto: "Childhood is not an age but the time when it's not too late." (Couto 2009, 103). This is the time that Francisco experiences, which overflows in his whole body... In his glowing eyes, in his generous smile... A childlike time... This is Francisco's time: an ever-present time, the discovery of a condition that he realizes is his own, that cannot be denied to him. It is not too late. It is never too late. At the end of his speech, Francisco says in the midst of his cheerful prose with the teachers: "Now I want to know which school I'm going to enroll in so I can keep learning..." Fortunately, Francisco's childhood is very much alive: it will no longer be too late to learn anything... to begin. His childhood in letters will no longer be taken away from him.

Francisco Cleudimar's joy is the joy of recovering a world from which he was excluded because of his class and color... so his entry into that world with all its honors is an act of reparation, justice, reparation... Francisco Cleudimar enters the world of letters with his lack of literate knowledge, but with his enormous knowledge of the things of the world... especially with his intense desire to know how to write the word screw, when he already knows almost everything about screws themselves... and also with this knowledge that he knows he doesn't know what he wants to know and it is his right to know. He knows what he already knows and he knows what he doesn't know and needs to know. And he knows that now he will no longer be excluded from the knowledge he always dreamed of having. He knows that his mutilated presence at university is finally over; the technical use that the university has made of his knowledge until now is no longer his single connection with the University; now he will go to university and school as a student, to learn something that visibly demonstrates desire, enchantment, and not just to make machines work. He will no longer go just as a worker, but as a student worker or as a worker student.



*Image 3: Francisco Cleudimar Bessa showing his literacy diploma*

What Francisco celebrates is also the possibility of experiencing another kind of time at school, close to its Greek etymology, the time of *skholé*, free time, freed from the social requirement of productivity. Before, Francisco Cleudimar's time was timed and measured according to the marks of a productivist society; he had to be efficient in the use of his labor power. He was paid for this. Now, as a public school student, he will enjoy unproductive study time, time to learn to read and write and also time to ask questions, think about the world and dream of other worlds.

What we are all celebrating with Francis is a transformative educational practice that opens the school's pedagogical doors to all those who have been excluded from them. We celebrate that Francisco and so many others can finally participate in a world that has excluded them without right. We also celebrate his joy, his curiosity, his desire to feel equally capable of learning as any other human being. We commemorate his desire to learn, his feeling like a student, and his conviction that the

public university is also his place. We commemorate Francisco's childhood and what an adult education that is sensitive to the strengths of childhood can do with people of all ages.

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## The joy of the joy of Francisco Cleudimar. A concrete experience of a transformative educational practice

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**Abstract.** In this text, we present the effects of a philosophical literacy experience in a concrete and tangible case of subjective transformation through an educational practice. First, we introduce the context and the

main elements of a philosophical literacy experience of formation carried out in the context of the “Supera RN” Program developed by the Regional Directorate of Education and Culture (15th Direc), as part of the state government’s policy to eradicate illiteracy in Rio Grande do Norte (RN), Brazil. Next, we present the emergence of Francisco Cleudimar, one of the students in this philosophical literacy process. Finally, we draw some political-pedagogical lessons from this unique emergence.

**Keywords:** philosophical literacy; teacher education

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### **La joie de la joie de Francisco Cleudimar. Une expérience concrète d'une pratique éducative transformatrice**

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**Résumé.** Dans ce texte, nous présentons les effets d’une expérience d’alphabétisation philosophique dans un cas concret et tangible de transformation subjective à travers une pratique éducative. Premièrement, nous présentons le contexte et les principaux éléments d’une expérience de formation en alphabétisation philosophique réalisée dans le cadre du programme « Supera RN » développé par la Direction régionale de l’éducation et de la culture (15e Direc), dans le cadre de la politique du gouvernement de l’État visant à éradiquer l’analphabétisme à Rio Grande do Norte (RN), au Brésil. Nous présentons ensuite l’émergence de Francisco Cleudimar, l’un des étudiants de ce processus d’alphabétisation philosophique. Enfin, nous tirons quelques enseignements politico-pédagogiques de cette émergence singulière.

**Mots clés:** alphabétisation philosophique; formation des enseignants

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### **La alegría de la alegría de Francisco Cleudimar. Una experiencia concreta de una práctica educativa transformadora**

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**Resumen.** En este texto presentamos los efectos de una experiencia de alfabetización filosófica en un caso concreto y tangible de transformación subjetiva a través de una práctica educativa. En primer lugar, presentamos el contexto y los principales elementos de una experiencia de formación en alfabetización filosófica realizada en el ámbito del Programa “Supera RN”, desarrollado por la Dirección Regional de Educación y Cultura (15ª Direc), como parte de la política de erradicación del analfabetismo del gobierno estatal en Rio Grande do Norte (RN), Brasil. A continuación, presentamos el surgimiento de Francisco Cleudimar, uno de los estudiantes de este proceso de alfabetización filosófica. Finalmente, extraemos algunas lecciones político-pedagógicas de esta emergencia singular.

**Palabras clave:** alfabetización filosófica; formación docente

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