Chapter 2

Everyday Life in Schools

Nilda Alves

This story\(^1\) refers to my experience during 25 years of research dedicated to understanding the everyday lives in educative networks. It will be told logically and according to thematics that emerged during that research and involved the author of this text. This story, however, as in every human experience, did not happen all at once, with all the understanding I have today, nor in the linearity of the explanation with which it is told here. However, although told in the first person, it must be made clear that it results as much from this author’s individual contribution as from a collective effort, because we are—and the whole story shows this—an accumulation of everyday actions and events, insignificant but necessary shapers of our humanity, the fruit of the labor of many. When describing these processes, I hope to show our permanent and everyday discovery that leads us to understand our daily need to create different ways of doing things, in knowledge networks and in multiple and complex significations.

The Beginning of My Story

My story begins by indicating how research on/into/with everyday lives began in Brazil, aware that the way in which I identify myself is only one of those existing lives, which leads me to affirm that it would be possible to write other stories about that particular relationship and call it *cultures and everyday lives*.
The first tendency of studies on everyday life originated from and was predominant in studies developed from a technicist view of everyday school life, supported by ways of thinking that arrived in Brazil with technicians from the United States, under “agreements” signed by the two countries. In those studies, everyday life—in the singular and treated as an abstraction, without considering the subjects involved—is identified as a “black box.” From the viewpoint of official proposals on education for the educative, scholastic, and other spacetimes, I can say that the idea of “black box” is still hegemonic throughout the world, although it is mentioned little in this study.

Those who use this “black box” metaphor seek to indicate the “impossibility” of knowing what, in fact, goes on inside the school, sustaining, at the same time, the idea that certain possible approximations are not necessary or that “what happens inside is not important,” and even “frequently wrong.” Consequently, without caring about what is happening inside the “black box,” those in that tendency feel that intervention in the system should focus on input, based on feedback using possible data obtained upon completion of the earlier process, possible, they believe, by evaluating the output. The application of the final exams of cycles and courses, as done in our country and many others, materializes that “model.”

A second tendency of research into everyday lives—now pluralized and involving the subjects—appears, in this story, when research processes are developed around two concepts that are based on the understanding that the hegemonic conceptions of everyday school life as well as its relations with culture are insufficient and even wrongly used for grasping what is happening in these everyday lives with their subjects and the problems they face and the solutions they find for them.

The first of these concepts shows a tendency that, when related to an important discussion on the new curriculum paradigms, refers to the theoretical-epistemological referential of Gramsci and of the philosophers of the so-called Frankfurt School, particularly Habermas. For that tendency, introducing the everyday dimension into curriculum studies was necessary to understand the school at its different levels and the relationships it had with the broader social reality. Methodologically, its researchers felt that, above all, the subjects’ active participation was indispensable, through meetings organized for that purpose and in a process called participant research. Due to this, the studies made have a strong relationship also with the social movements organized around that methodology, especially those based on the thinking of Paulo Freire.

The start of the second of these movements was related to the research of the American thinker Robert Stake (1983a, 1983b). He mentions, on