Open spaces: An investigation on the OSDE methodology in an advanced English conversation course in Brazil

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As the current formal educational system aims mainly at the linear transmission of knowledge, a transformative education that focuses on the collaborative construction of knowledges and on the development of critical skills is utterly necessary. In English language teaching in particular, critical education is essential not only due to the privileged economic, cultural and linguistic position that the English language holds (Pennycook, 1999), but also due to the fact that language is taught primarily as a code to be deciphered, and its teaching usually does not take into account the subjectivities of the individuals that take part in the language, the power relations that exist in the contexts in which it is used, and the ideologies and cultural practices that cannot be detached from language itself. (Jordão, 2006) From this assumption, in this article I will report a study (that was made into a monograph as one of the requisite criteria for the achievement of the Research Degree in Linguistics at the Federal University of Parana) on the use of the Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry methodology (OSDE) in an advanced English conversation course in Brazil. I will start with a discussion on some theoretical perspectives I associate with the OSDE methodology, such as critical literacy, Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Autonomy, power relations in education (from a Foucaultian perspective) and Stephen Sterling's concept of sustainable education. I will then analyse how the construction of the open space for critical engagement with the different perspectives in the world, as suggested by the methodology, took place.

Critical Literacy

Ontologically, critical literacy offers a view of reality as something that cannot be concretely captured and definitively known. Reality does not exist outside the subject: It is intrinsically connected to the individual, being constructed in language and by the eye of the observer, and being historically, socially, politically, ideologically and discursively determined. Since reality is not independent from the one who observes, there is not only one reality to which the observer has direct access: there are different possible realities, all equally valid and legitimate because they are coherent with the experience of the observer. (Maturana, 2001) Epistemologically, critical literacy proposes that knowledge is not neutral; it is ideological and always governed by the discursive rules and by the power relations which determine the contexts in which the knowledges exist. (Foucault, 2002)

Acting within the critical literacy paradigm is to act in Maturana's 'objectivity in parentheses' (Maturana, 2001, p. 31-42) in which the existence of different legitimate realities, determined by the eye of the observer, makes it possible to live in an open space where the different understandings are respected and where a complete and irresponsible denial of the legitimacy of the other is not possible. It is worth observing that for Maturana (2001, p. 31-42) there are two ontological domains: the 'objectivity without parentheses' and the 'objectivity in parentheses'. In the 'objectivity without parentheses' the existence does not depend on the observer; there is a reality which is external to the subject and to which the individual has privileged access. Living in this explanatory path is to understand that there is only one possible truth and those who do not agree with it are wrong, and therefore, their understandings are completely and irresponsibly denied in an act of intolerance

towards the other that does not take their worldviews into consideration. On the other hand, in the 'objectivity in parentheses' there is the understanding that different possible truths exist, all determined by the eye of the observer. Therefore, living in this explanatory path is to recognise and respect the other's understanding, and the denial of the other's understanding is made in a responsible way, without denying its legitimacy. It is important to stress that, for Maturana, in daily life we do not live just in the 'objectivity in parentheses' or just in the 'objectivity without parentheses'. For him, we continually move from one explanatory domain to the other, according to what the contexts demand from us.

The educational proposal of critical literacy is to challenge "the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social development", (Shor, 1997) connecting all the different aspects in life in order to rethink them. As critical literacy aims to develop critical self-consciousness and an awareness of the contexts in which the subject takes part—which allows them to "remake their own identities and sociopolitical realities through their own meaning-making processes and through their actions in the world" (Cervetti, Pardales, & Damico, 2001)—the subject is seen as central to the process of (re)shaping the world through words.

Pedagogy of Autonomy

Central to *The Pedagogy of Autonomy*, the work in which educator Paulo Freire reiterates and reinforces many of his understandings about a critical, humanistic, ideologically marked, never neutral education, is the idea that both educators and learners are the subjects of education, one being necessary to the other in the dialogical process that education is. For Freire, there is no teaching without learning, and although different from each other, the subjects who take part in education cannot be reduced to the condition of being the object of the other. (Freire, 1996, p. 23) In this understanding, the student is not the object of the teacher, in which the latter deposits all his/her knowledges and the former learns passively—the main characteristic of 'banking education'. On the contrary, both the student and the teacher mutually contribute to the construction of their understandings of the world, which makes education a dialogical, critical, reflective and polyphonic process. In this perspective, there is not a mere extension of knowledge, but a collaborative construction of knowledges.

In this understanding, respect towards the learners' readings of the world is essential, as it is not possible to construct knowledges without acknowledging the other. Thus, it is necessary for educators not to act as if they held all the truths of the world merely because of the fact that they hold a socially legitimated position. Teachers must recognise students' socially constructed knowledges as legitimate and valid, so that the latter may feel as subjects of the educational process as well. This respect towards the other's knowledge promotes openness to dialogue with other perspectives and stops us from becoming certain of our certainties:

> The best way to keep awake and alert my capacity for right thinking, to sharpen my perception, and to hear with respect (and therefore in a disciplined manner) is to allow myself to be open to differences and to refuse the entrenched dogmatism that makes me incapable of learning anything new. In essence, the correct posture of one who does not consider him- or herself to be the sole possessor of the truth or the passive object of ideology or gossip is the attitude of permanent openness. Openness to approaching and being approached, to questioning and

being questioned, to agreeing and disagreeing. It is an openness to life itself and its vicissitudes. (Freire, 1996, p. 134)

This permanent availability to living in the path of the 'objectivity in parentheses' makes us a bit more conscious that we are social, cultural and historical beings, therefore, partial and incomplete. Being aware of that, we take on a more critical stance towards ourselves and the others, and, thus, learning becomes a way to construct (and reconstruct) the world, which for Freire is a complex task that generates far more knowledges than the task of simply adapting to the world. (Freire, 1996, p. 77)

By taking on the role of critical educators we put the learner's autonomy as central to the educational practice. The development of autonomy is gradual and occurs as the reading of the world of the learner is recognised as legitimate within the educational environment, which makes the student feel increasingly responsible for his/her own learning. The promotion of the autonomy of the learner begins with the educator's own consciousness of his/her own unfinished character, and, consequently, this consciousness is reflected on his/her pedagogical practice. Thus, both educators and learners become the subjects of their own learning, dialogically constructing and deconstructing their knowledges.

Power Relations in Education

Knowledge and power are intrinsically connected. Be it in politics, in the relations among people, or in institutions, this relationship is present and determines the way these spaces function. This relationship is not different in education where whoever has more knowledge is able to pass it on. However, this is not any knowledge: it is the knowledge that is legitimated by the educational institution. To those who own this legitimated knowledge, in this case the teachers, a privileged power position in the school is granted. This knowledge, however, is only legitimated because it corresponds to what the educational code understands as right, to the 'will to truth' (Foucault, 2002) of the educational system. (Foucault, 2002, p. 15-18) Thus, in the traditional classroom, it is the teacher who has the voice; here the student is a mere recipient for the teacher's knowledge and does not have a voice within this context, which makes the learner an object of education. The socially constructed knowledges of the students do not fit into what the school determines as valid and true knowledge, which puts the students to the margin of the teacher's central role. In reference to Foucault, the student's voice at school can be thus compared to the madman's, whose discourse is not taken into consideration because it is different and dissonant from the socially legitimated knowledge. Nevertheless, there are moments in which the voice of the madman is taken into consideration (when it is heard by a psychiatrist, for instance) and the word is symbolically given to him/her, not necessarily becoming legitimate. (Foucault, 2002, p. 10-12) The same happens at school: under the (legitimate) argument that it is necessary to listen to what is different, the word is symbolically given to the student, but it is not taken into account in its totality, being silenced by the prevailing voice of the teacher and the school. The discourse of the student, of the madman or any other discourse that is on the margin of the legitimated knowledge is silenced because

> there is in our society, and, I imagine, in all others, but following a different outline and different rhythms, a profound logophobia, a sort of mute terror against these events, against this mass of things said, against the surging-up of all these statements, against all that could be violent,

> discontinuous, pugnacious, disorderly as well, and perilous about them—against this great incessant and disordered buzzing of discourse. (Foucault, 2002, p. 50)

The power relations will always exist and cannot be erased. These relations, however, are not fixed; there is a dislocation, a constant change of positions of what is considered legitimated knowledge and marginal knowledge. Therefore, it is important that these power relations exist as it is only due to the impossibility of erasing them that knowledges are questioned and challenged, in a process of re-elaboration and construction of new knowledges. In my understanding, this is where Freire's proposal of a dialogical and reflective education fits in: he proposes that the educational discourse be more polyphonic, that the voice of the student be heard and recognised as legitimate, not necessarily taking the place of the teacher's discourse, but living with it in the same space. In this understanding, the voice of the educator is not the only one possible, but it is one of the possible discourses in education.

Sustainable Education

Starting from the argument that the "key to creating a more sustainable and peaceful world is learning", and bearing in mind the paradoxical character of education that, if on the one hand claims to be humanistic and proposes democratic values, on the other, in practice, reinforces the mechanicist character of education, aiming at the achievement of pre-established goals, Sterling (2001) suggests that education be rethought and revised in order to promote changes in the educational paradigms. These changes establish a 'sustainable education', which is defined by Sterling (2001) as

> a change of educational culture which both develops and embodies the theory and practice of sustainability in a way which is critically aware. This would be a transformative paradigm that values, sustains and realizes human potential *in relation to* the need to attain and sustain social, economic and ecological wellbeing, recognizing that they are deeply interdependent, (p. 22)

and leading us to an ecological and sustainable development, something extremely relevant to the complex world in which we live. Nevertheless, to move from a mechanicist educational paradigm to a transformative one, it is necessary that the worldview that sustains the paradigm be changed first. It is necessary, then, that we move from a mechanicist worldview, that categorises things in fixed and dichotomic compartments, and hinders us from seeing the connections among them, to an ecological worldview, whose emphasis is in the relations and connections among the things that exist in the world, being these relations "based on participation, empowerment and self-organisation" (Sterling, 2001, p. 49).

In order to better understand how this proposal for a sustainable education can take place, Sterling analyses the current state of education focusing on an aspect he considers fundamental: the purpose of education. According to Sterling, in every educational system there are different functions that are informed by different assumptions and that have diverse and even conflicting objectives. The four main functions of education can be summarised as follows:

- To replicate society and culture and promote citizenship – the *socialization* function;
- To train people for employment – the *vocational* function;
- To develop the individual and his/her potential – the *liberal* function; and

- To encourage change towards a fairer society and better world – the *transformative* function." (Sterling, 2001, p. 25)

Bearing these educational perspectives in mind, it is possible to note that, currently, education is informed mainly by the *vocational* function, which makes education eminently transmissive, cast in the moulds of what Freire calls 'banking education'. The *socialization* function has a smaller, but increasing role in the current state of education, as it responds to the social needs, which are not addressed by the previous function. The *liberal* perspective is present in restricted environments, usually in the private sector. And last, the *transformative* perspective exists in rhetoric, but, although on the margin of the mainstream conception of education, it represents a possible renovation (Sterling, 2001, p. 28), as transformative education is constructive and participative; and aims at learning and not training; focuses on the construction of knowledges; is interested in mutual transformation; and takes the different knowledges constructed in the communities into account. (Sterling, 2001, p. 38)

For a shift from a traditional educational and cultural paradigm to a transformative paradigm to happen, it is necessary to understand the distinction of what Sterling terms 'first order change and learning', 'second order change and learning' and 'third order change and learning'. First order change "takes place within accepted boundaries" (Sterling, 2001, p. 15); we do more of the same, without reflecting upon the assumptions that inform those attitudes. Second order change has as its main characteristic critical reflection, which makes us examine the assumptions which inform first order learning. Third order change, in turn, is more profound and involves the perception and the awareness of the different perspectives that exist in the world and of the possibility of acting in different ways. (Sterling, 2001, p. 15) Sustainable education is thus underpinned by second and third order change, as transformative education requires reflection upon the *status quo*, in a collaborative meaning-making process, which takes us to a more critical systemic understanding of the world and, when possible, makes us change our attitudes towards the others and ourselves as well.

Nevertheless, shifting from mechanicist education to ecological and sustainable education is not simple and immediate as it involves a shift in worldviews and practices, and also an articulation between knowledges and powers. As changing to a transformative educational paradigm also requires a shift in paradigms at cultural, social and economic levels, resistance often occurs. This resistance occurs because the use of a transformative methodology is "more difficult, time-consuming, and unpredictable" (Sterling, 2001, p. 36). However, despite being more difficult and unpredictable, changing paradigms and practices, even if at a micro level, is essential if we want to make education a space where learning and the construction of meanings are not imposed, but made by its own subjects, leading to a sustainable, therefore more significant, learning.

OSDE Methodology

The Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE) methodology (http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk), hosted by the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ), Nottingham University, is being developed collaboratively by educators and researchers in different fields of study in different countries. The methodology suggests the creation of open spaces for learning in which people are invited to engage critically, through dialogue, with their own as well as the others' perspectives. The construction of the open space is collaborative and has the objective of creating environments for learning in which people can reflect upon their worldviews and discuss, in a

constant process of learning and (de)construction of meanings. The development of critical literacy and independent thinking are the main objectives of the methodology as they enable people to become critical citizens who know how to deal with the complexities, changes and uncertainties of the contexts in which they take part, skills that must be developed in order to live in a global, diverse and unequal society. (Open spaces for dialogue and enquiry, 2005; see also Sterling, 2001)

In order to make the construction of the open space possible, the OSDE methodology proposes a set of principles:

1. Every individual brings to the space valid and legitimate knowledge constructed in their own contexts;
2. All knowledge is partial and incomplete; and
3. All knowledge can be questioned. (Open spaces for dialogue and enquiry, 2005, p. 4)

My interpretation is that the principles above suggest that no perspective, experience or worldview is better than the other, and that all the participants in the open space can feel free to express and question the others and, mainly, themselves. It is worth noting that these three principles are essential to the establishment of the open space as a truly open space is only possible when its participants share the paradigm that all knowledges are equally valid within the space, acting in the 'objectivity in parentheses' (Maturana, 2001, p. 31-42). However, it is important to stress that the principles must not be imposed on the group of participants, but negotiated with them in order to correspond to the unique characteristics of each open space.

In order to enable the development of the necessary abilities to deal with local and global issues critically, the methodology also proposes that the participants be exposed to different perspectives and, for that, suggests the use of the following procedures:

1. Stimulus: aims to cause dissonance and promote the perception of the complexity of the issue;
2. Informed thinking: aims to inform participants through legitimated and non-legitimated perspectives so that they can make more informed decisions regarding the topic;
3. Reflexive questions: promote identification of the participants with the issue and enables him/her to question their personal assumptions, contradictions and responsibilities;
4. Group dialogue questions: help participants clarify their perceptions of themselves and the others through dialogue with the group;
5. Responsible choices: the objective is to make participants examine their self-reflective process through simulations of real-life problems;
6. Debriefing: the moment in which participants evaluate the session, their learning and the self-reflective process. (http://www.osdemethodology.org.uk)

The stages above facilitate the organisation of the questioning process, but do not have to be strictly followed and, as the principles, they can and must be adapted to the different groups in which an open space is being constructed.

To assure the effective construction of the open space, in addition to the principles, the procedures and, most importantly, to the participants' openness to questioning themselves and being questioned, it is necessary that teachers set the role of transmitter of knowledge aside and take on the role of mediator. In an open space, the mediator "is responsible for modelling behaviour, opening, holding

and closing the time/space, guiding participants through the stages and, during discussions, playing the role of devil's advocate, exploring different angles and moving the group away from consensus." (Open spaces for dialogue and enquiry, 2005, p. 5) It is worth highlighting that in an open space the mediator does not seek neutrality. In this sense, the OSDE methodology is very close to Freirean pedagogy: by taking on the role of mediator, the teacher is taking on the posture that his/her knowledge is not better than the student's knowledge and, thus, a continuous dialogue between teacher, student and knowledge is established, making education a collaborative process of knowledge construction.

As the methodology aims to create spaces in which knowledges are constructed and not simply linearly transmitted from the teacher to the student, I see the Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry methodology as a model of transformative methodology which aims at a constructive and participative education, as proposed by Sterling (2001), and whose objective is to promote second, or even third order change and learning.

Other Worlds

The advanced English conversation course 'Other Worlds' took place in the first semester of 2007. Its setting was the Intercultural and Language Center (CELIN) of the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil, a school where graduate and post-graduate students of Languages and Literatures at this university can develop their educational practices in a reflective way by experiencing and sharing their experiences inside and outside the classroom with their peers.

Having the OSDE methodology as its basis, the main goal of the 45 hour course was to create an open space for learning where the participants could relate to one another in an exercise of critical engagement with their own perspectives and with the others' perspectives through conversation in English. As the course objectives were differentiated from other regular conversation courses, course activities did not focus on traditional vocabulary, speaking and listening exercises; lessons were carried out in an informal way, without activities directed to improving the linguistic proficiency of students. In 'Other Worlds', the English language was not an end in itself, but a means of communication for the intended reflective work. In addition, participants were not given grades in their course evaluation, as this would have been in opposition with the purpose of the course and would have made the process of reflecting on one's learning less efficient: Participants might have acted upon their desire to achieve good grades instead of developing their ability to think critically.

Seventeen people from different backgrounds, proficiency levels and with different expectations in relation to the course took part in 'Other Worlds'. My role in the course was to mediate the space and did not consist in transmitting contents, but in proposing conversations and enquiries so that the participants could reflect on and express themselves concerning issues I found relevant discussing with the group. As a mediator, I tried to organise the space and to make sure that the different perspectives of the participants were heard and taken into consideration. In addition, as suggested by the OSDE methodology, I tried to play the role of devil's advocate in order to question certain postures of the participants and to avoid reaching consensus.

In the first session, I gave a brief introduction of the course and we discussed the main assumptions underlying 'Other Worlds'. In the first half of the course, we discussed issues of global and local

relevance such as notions of development, the position of English in the world, globalisation, culture and the barriers for listening to one another. As to the material used to prompt the discussions, most part of it was adapted from the units elaborated by the devisers of the methodology, and I did not only use material in English, but also in Portuguese, for I believe that, in certain moments, working with the target language was less important than the reflection on the theme. Although a variety of material was used for the sessions, I tried to make the participants' voices, and their varied understandings of the world, the primordial source for the discussions.

In order for the participants to take part in the construction of the open space in a different manner, in the second half of the course I proposed that they formed groups and mediated one session by choosing themes of their interest to be discussed with the group. A variety of issues were brought up such as responsibility and individualism, environmental problems, motivation, and M. C. Escher (Dutch graphic artist well-known for prints of impossible constructions that challenge common logic).

In three different moments in the course, with the participants' consent I applied a learning diary to ten of the seventeen participants in which they were to reflect on the construction of the open space, their critical engagement with the different perspectives, their learning processes, the organisation of the course, the open space principles, and any other aspect they found relevant to point out.

When asked if the participants felt there was an atmosphere in which they could feel free to express themselves and to challenge their own worldviews as well as the others', most participants said there was a favourable atmosphere for discussion and engagement but it had not existed from the beginning of the course: It was gradually constructed as the sessions took place. In one of the participants' words: "in the beginning it is more difficult to express ideas and opinions, but with time and as we get to know one another, the process becomes easier, enabling us to express ourselves without fear" (Participant 1). Therefore, gaining confidence in one another was fundamental for some of the participants to feel comfortable when expressing themselves. Another participant pointed out that the group not only felt free to express themselves but also to challenge the others' viewpoints and, by taking on this stance of questioning and listening to one another, an atmosphere of mutual respect prevailed (Participant 8).

In this aspect, most participants said that the contact with different perspectives made their perception of their own perspectives, as well as the perception of the others', clearer. In this sense, and as stated by one of the participants, the presence of the other is essential as it makes it possible for our understandings of the world to be questioned and challenged (Participant 5). Nevertheless, for the questioning to take place, a permanent openness to questioning and being questioned is necessary (Freire, 1996), as stated by one of the participants:

> So far, I have learned that there is in me a great disposition to understand/know other people, even not agreeing with them. About the others—and I see myself in them—I would say that it is really hard to abandon/review certain values that are part of each one's life, even when these values start being questioned. If the course has helped me to be clearer about my perspectives, it is in the sense that it makes me see all the time my lack of clarity. The others seem more confident in their points of view, but maybe that cannot be attributed to the course. If my perspectives have changed? [sic]I try to change when I identify with something that excites me (that opens new horizons), but it is not always that I can do it—or rather, it takes

> me time to change. This way, if there is any change to happen, it will be in a period longer than this semester. (Participant 8)

If on the one hand most members of the group demonstrated a disposition to change and to review their understandings, on the other hand, one of the participants categorically said that her perspectives had not changed, but that she had had the opportunity to get to know new people and their perspectives (Participant 10). She took on the posture that her knowledge is fixed, an attitude that might have hindered her from seeing in different ways. Nevertheless, in my point of view, I believe it is impossible for perspectives not to change in such a setting, as she incisively affirmed; the mere contact with the other makes us reflect and, therefore, some sort of change takes place, even if we are not (or do not want to be) aware of it.

According to the participants, everyone had the opportunity to speak and express their worldviews, but not all of them made use of it. There were people who spoke more often and more easily, but there were those who opted to be silent, to listen to what the others had to say. I see this dichotomy verbalisation/silence in two ways. This silence may have been a deliberate option of some participants for reasons that may range from shyness to the (supposed) lack of knowledge about the subject. Another possibility is that this silence was not a conscious option, but an imposition due to the fact that there were participants who expressed themselves more frequently and more incisively, and who presented their arguments in a more elaborate way. Thus, some participants silenced themselves (or were silenced) because they did not see the space as appropriate to express themselves or even because they felt their opinions were not as valid as the opinions of those who could elaborate their arguments better or who, according to Foucault (2002), were seen as having more legitimated knowledge than others.

The option for silence may also have been due to the use of English as a means for communication in 'Other Worlds'. As power and knowledge are inseparable and due to the privileged economic and cultural position English holds in contemporary global society (Pennycook, 1999), knowing English grants its speakers socially legitimated knowledge. I noticed that, in 'Other Worlds', those who were (or seen as) more proficient in English were those who expressed themselves more in the group. However, this was not a determining factor concerning the participation of students in the space. Some participants, aware of their limitations as to their proficiency in English, felt that in certain moments the use of English represented a barrier to express the message they wanted to convey in a more precise way, but it did not hinder them from stating their opinions and engaging in dialogue with the group. More than a mere barrier to the communication of a message, I noticed that English made the reflective questioning process fade into the background, thus foregrounding the linguistic performance.

As to the use of the principles suggested by the OSDE methodology to help in the construction of the open space, many of the group members said that the principles were adopted and sustained by the participants and the mediator throughout the course. Although most participants agreed that the principles were used all the time, one of them stated: "I can say that most part of the time all the principles of the OSDE methodology were adopted. It is very hard to achieve/use them all the time, but most part of the time it is possible" (Participant 5). As this student, I believe that it is really impossible to integrally adopt the three principles due to the power relations which are established in the spaces in which we take part, (Foucault, 2002) even if the objective is to construct an open space. In the open

space that was being constructed in 'Other Worlds', even if the aim was to recognise all knowledges as valid and legitimate, some knowledges were recognised as more valid than others, be it the knowledge of the most proficient participants or the knowledge of those who had more elaborate arguments. Although I tried not to take on the role of the teacher who transmits his/her knowledge linearly, I noticed that at certain moments my arguments were recognised by the participants as more valid as I held a more legitimated, therefore privileged position as the teacher/mediator of the course. In addition, I believe that the impossibility of integrally adopting the principles is due not only to the fact that there are more legitimated positions than others. I realise that, even if a transformative methodological model is adopted, such as the OSDE methodology and as suggested by Sterling (2001), there still is a strong echo of a transmissive and mechanicist educational model, which aims to maintain the power relations, and which rules our educational practices even though we do not agree with such a model.

In this aspect, I believe that the proposal of the OSDE methodology of constructing open spaces in which people are made to think about their own learning in a more ecological way is of extreme relevance to English language teaching. In this context, as well as in other educational contexts, the instrumental and transmissive view of teaching predominates to the detriment of other manners of doing education, which is particularly delicate due to the increasingly relevant role English plays in the world. As a teacher of English as a foreign language in Brazil, I believe it is fundamental to take on the role of the educator who reflects on the implication of his/her practice and instead of simply teaching a linguistic code. And it is in this aspect that a more critical approach to English language teaching is essential. Therefore, the use of the Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry methodology in English language teaching presents a way for the pedagogical practice to be not only about teaching language as a code to be deciphered as the knowledge is transmitted to the students, but also about seeing language as a discursive and ideological construct on which we build our understandings of the world (Jordão, 2006).

Nevertheless, in my observations as mediator in 'Other Worlds' I realised that the proposal of the Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry methodology is not so easy to be implemented. It is not by the mere adoption of a set of procedures and principles suggested by the methodology that we guarantee the creation of a truly open space. It is necessary that the subjectivities of the individuals involved in the process, the context and the power relations that permeate it be taken into account. I realised that an open space is constructed gradually by its subjects and not imposed on its participants, and that it can never be established in its totality due to the power relations that permeate any space, whether open or not. Therefore, in order for the collaborative construction of an open space to take place it is necessary that participants and mediators be willing to engage critically with knowledges, be open to reflective questioning and be committed to the process of constructing an open space. And, even if not to a full extent, I believe that in 'Other Worlds' this willingness, openness and commitment took place, in an attempt to understand the different perspectives (and the assumptions that inform them and their implications), in a continuous and challenging reflective exercise.

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