ISSN 2178-2229

DOI: https://doi.org/10.18764/2178-2229v31n2.2024.26

Participant research in ethnography: the importance of the student as a research subject[1]

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Abstract: This article aims to understand the interactions established by students in the classroom. It is based on participant research at a School of Government which, in general terms, is an institution within the government structure that trains graduate civil servants to improve their activities in state agency. It seeks to answer the following questions: How can class dynamics be modified as students and teachers interact, and what interactional strategies are used by the participants and to what extent are the intentions behind these interactions considered? Ethnographic research was carried out, based on the microsociology Erving Goffman and microanalysis of class videos. The analysis generated categories such as: participation, interaction strategy and barriers to learning. The results point to the need to reveal the importance of interactive movements motivated by the student and their role as the subject of their learning process.
Keywords: ethnography; participant research; face-to-face interaction; student as subject.

1 Introduction

The objective of the present article is to analyze classroom interactions between students and teachers so as to understand their importance in the dynamics of the educational process. According to Crane (2000), it is not possible to make schools better places for learning if we do not listen to what students have to say. Not rarely, though, these interactions happen in the form of difficult confrontations with teachers who, to overcome certain situations, end up resorting to condescending behaviors that do not explain or add value to the issues raised by students. Undoubtedly, the exchanges that take place in such classroom interactions can lead to knowledge acquisition by both those who are teaching and those who are learning.

The discussion regarding the analysis of face-to-face interactions is supported by a study entitled *Inclusion in Public Administration: a study on the role of a school of government in the development of more inclusive cultures, policies and public practices,* coordinated by this author and carried out between 2015 and 2018. Three courses from the

[1] Translation to English by Cecília Mattos.

Rio de Janeiro School of Government were chosen to be a part of the study. They are: i) Cost-effectiveness in Biddings – 16 contact hours; ii) Internal Control – 36 contact hours and; iii) Cost-effectiveness in Biddings for Administrative Contracts – Procurement and Services – 24 contact hours. Schools of Government are schools that provide training to active public servants – adult university-graduates currently working at state agencies. The faculty members at these schools are also public servants, experts in the fields they teach but who do not necessarily have a degree in Education.[2]

Using an ethnographic research approach, for a period of 6 months, and based on Goffman's microsociology (2012c), at least two researchers from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro attended the selected courses, observed the daily interactions in that space and registered them by means of field notes and videos. These data collection tools allowed scenes to be revisited and analyzed repeatedly, going beyond what had been seen or written down originally. Such records were timestamped, segmented, transcribed, coded, and categorized based on Laurence Bardin's Content Analysis technique (2011).

The analysis led to the definition of three main categories: i) Student participation (164 instances), ii) Interaction strategy (147 instances), and iii) Barriers to learning (116 instances). The results highlighted the importance of interactive movements motivated by students and the role they play in their own learning process.

2 Research at a school of government

The choice of a School of Government as research site was made in 2011 when, after completing my doctorate, I was invited to take on the position of Pedagogical Advisor at this school. The contrasts with the references of basic education schools that I had were dramatic and motivated me to learn more about this different educational model. As a result, since the beginning of my work at this new institution, I sought to meet with teachers to reflect upon the processes of inclusion in education, teaching, and learning of adult students. My employment contract at this school ended when I passed a public competition to teach at a university.

A few years later, in 2015, I had the opportunity to return to the School of Government to carry out research. Did it matter how these teachers, most of them without a degree in Education, developed their teaching and if this development considered the principles of inclusion? In addition to such perspective on teachers, I was also interested in how relationships with students were built. Did students participate in their own learning processes, or did they perceive themselves as mere repositories of content?

[2] Research approved on Plataforma Brazil under CAAE report number: 35349214.8.0000.5582.

As public servants responsible for the external control of public accounts who had vast experience in their fields, these teachers accepted the challenge of transferring the necessary knowledge so that other civil servants, appointed by the State, could work with greater confidence in their municipalities. The school provided guidance and offered teaching courses to improve their practices.

The history of Schools of Government began with Constitutional Amendment 19/1998 which, in its second paragraph, amended article 39 of the Federal Constitution of Brazil (1988) and determined that the Union, the States and the Federal District maintain Schools of Government for the training and professional development of public servants, with participation in courses being one of the requirements for career promotion. This amendment led to the signing of agreements or contracts between federated entities. From then on, several institutions of this type were founded in the country, leading civil servants, individually or collectively, to seek these trainings with the aim of improving their practices and advancing in their public careers.

These schools lie within the scope of Higher Education and are public institutions whose purpose is to promote the training, development, and professionalization of public agents, seeking to strengthen and expand the State's execution capacity, with a view to developing, monitoring, and evaluating public policies.

The National Network of Schools of Government, created in 2003, brings together more than 200 institutions and promotes the exchange of experiences, in addition to encouraging partnerships between schools belonging to the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches at the municipal, state, and federal levels. Such institutions consist of public foundations, national institutes, judicial schools, legislative schools, military schools and academies, teaching and training centers, court of audit schools, study and development centers for state ministries, corporate universities, higher education schools, federal institutes, and public universities. Their role is to improve the quality of public administration and ultimately to improve the service provided to citizens.

For the purposes of this article, it should be noted that the school at stake is connected to a state court of audit. Its faculty are employees of this court whereas its students are employees of the municipalities under its jurisdiction.

3 **Theoretical, epistemological and methodological frameworks:** microsociology, face-to-face interaction, and symbolic interactionism

Erving Goffman, renowned Canadian sociologist of the 20th century, applied the same observation methods used in cultural anthropology to the study of modern civilization. He understood that, in contemporary societies, someone's regional background, or the fact

that one belongs to a social class, or any other category is marked by rituals that distinguish individuals and groups, such as the way one dresses or presents themselves publicly. Goffman studied social interactions in everyday life, particularly in public spaces. He is considered a social-interactionist (Chicago School) and has carried out research in interpretative and cultural sociology. He states that the study of interaction should consider the syntactic relationships between the acts of different people mutually present to one another.

Goffman (2012a) analyzes social reality, and instead of questioning what reality is, he states that what actually matters is the impression we have of the real character of reality, as opposed to the feeling that some situations do not possess this quality. While wondering about the conditions under which this feeling occurs, he states that this question is related to a small and manageable problem, which has to do with the camera, and not with what is being photographed. The author conducts his work around frameworks starting with the following question: What is it that is going on here? For him, it is the search for this answer that makes people frame their experiences.

The concept of frameworks/frames consists of understanding the various types of everyday situations that may be deemed real or unreal and to what extent the situations also organize ways of articulating one's interpretation of what happens (Goffman, 2012a). It seeks to understand the relational dimension of meaning focusing on the ways in which actors organize their experiences. It is based on this interpretative process of the situation and on previous experiences that evaluate which lines of action (behaviors) are socially chosen, accepted, and shared.

Frames can be primary or transformed. Primary frameworks are further broken down into natural and social. Transformed frameworks can be fabricated or keyed. Natural primary frameworks are unoriented, unanimated, and/or unguided experiences. They occur when we observe manifestations of nature, such as the sunrise or rainfall, among others. These events are seen as suffering no interference of human agency or intentionality. Social primary frameworks, on the other hand, are experiences controlled by human agency, such as rules, laws, norms, habits, culture, power relations, institutions, organizations etc. An infinite number of phenomena and situations produced by human action can be cited here, such as, in this study, the courses selected.

In the case of transformed frameworks, fabricated frames are characterized by situations in which there is an asymmetry of power between those involved in relation to what is happening, i.e. at least one of the individuals involved does not know that that situation has been transformed and plotted. We can see this in pranks, surprises, scams, etc. In keyed frames, in turn, everyone involved in a given situation knows that the frame has been transformed, such as in games, make-believe play, ceremonies, rehearsals, practices, etc. Goffman also refers to frame breaks, which occur when there is a misinterpretation of what

is happening in the frame or when certain behaviors exhibited are deemed inappropriate as they go against the expectations of those involved in the situation. When this happens, the individual will most likely lose control. They can then either maintain the organization of the experience but with a change of tone, that is, go for direct action (underkeying) or treat the event with jocosity (overkeying).

> Thus, drivers sometimes become so enraged that they will chase another driver or pedestrian with the intent to do them harm; hockey players sometimes forget to stylize their aggressions as part of the instrumental moves of the game and use their sticks openly as clubs (Goffman, 2012a, p. 459).

In the case of overkeying, the jocosity can increase in proportion and amplitude until the subject breaks away from the situation itself and plunges into a crude version of it. In Goffman's microsociology, face-to-face interaction is the fruitful direction for anonymizing (disobeying) the world. "The micro to which Goffman directs his gaze does not seem to be effectively the delimitation of a space or group, but the focus on the interactions that take place in a determined situation" (Martino; Santos, 2020, p.72). On occasions when two or more people are in the immediate physical presence of one another, a complex set of norms will regulate the interaction. And, if a conversation occurs, then norms regarding the organization of speaking turns and the beginning and end of the encounter in which the exchange takes place will apply. Consequently, any constant violation of these rules – whether involuntary or intentional – will have a triggering effect, destabilizing the entire interaction in which the offender participates.

> Just as an individual can lose control when faced with an instrumental physical activity (such as when they are unable to thread a needle), they can also lose control and break the frame in the way they manage the production of words – in fact, this type of temperamental and haphazard outburst is the most obvious one (Goffman, 2012a, p. 601).

The author points out that, in a face-to-face interaction, participants need to be in certain visual and auditory proximity to communicate. This means that the environment of objects, people and sounds not participating in the conversation, which could interfere, has been accommodated our is being accommodated. However, the author emphasizes that this interconnection with the surrounding world concerns the vocal apparatus (and the way things are said) just as much as or even more than the messages exchanged through it.

> Furthermore, participants will be subjected to norms of good manners: through the frequency and duration of speaking turns, through avoided topics, through circumspection regarding self-references, through attention paid willingly or unwillingly –

> through all these means, hierarchical and social relationships will be duly respected (Goffman, 2012a, p. 606).

According to Nizet and Rigaux (2016), if Goffman were to designate the most fundamental rule of social order, it would certainly be that of saving face. According to the great sociologist, in every interaction, one must first avoid losing face and then save the face of others. This rule makes the creation and maintenance of bonds with others possible. Goffman (2012a) defines the term face as the positive social value a person effectively claims for themselves by the line others assume they have taken in a particular contact.

> Due to this fundamental rule of face, each individual generally has the right to follow their own line of conduct and the duty to accept that of others. This mutual acceptance is not necessarily sincere; it can be feigned. Thus, in a conversation, participants might accept to momentarily express opinions with which they do not necessarily agree, in order not to hurt a partner's self-esteem (Nizet; Rigaux, 2016, p. 50).

With this in mind, Goffman describes the exchanges that occur throughout an interaction. When the rule of saving face is violated, it becomes essential to restore order. Reparation takes place through an exchange in which the offender expresses that they respect the rules and that they are aware of the violation committed. In this case, the fault is considered exceptional. The offended party, in turn, implies that they accept the reparation, and the interaction can proceed until a certain balance is restored (Nizet; Rigaux, 2016).

For the purposes of the present study, I assume that the part of Goffman's work selected – namely, the notion of reality, frames of social experience, and the rule of saving face – will be sufficient. Added to this theoretical framework, the methodological framework of ethnography, ethnographic microanalysis, and symbolic interactionism will provide the necessary support for the analysis of interactions between students and teachers in the courses observed.

The ethnographic approach was used in the research conducted for this article. Broadly speaking, it helps in describing, understanding, and interpreting the social and cultural phenomena studied, especially, in this case, the interactions between teachers and course participants in the School of Government. This approach considers that meanings cannot be reduced to quantifiable variables (Minayo, 2001) and prioritizes processes over results.

In this field, ethnographic research plays a fundamental role in increasing qualitative productions, as "[…] much of what is known about field relations, about openness and direction toward a field and its members, is known through ethnographic research" (Angrosino, 2009, p.11). Filgue, Hammersley e Atkinson (2022) present ethnography as one of many methodological approaches found in social research. The origins of the term ethnography

are linked to ethnology, which refers to the historical and comparative analysis of societies and cultures. The fieldwork of anthropologists allowed ethnography to develop its own body of work by integrating direct empirical investigation and comparative or theoretical analyzes of social organization and culture.

Ethnography, as a scientific research approach, allows for capturing the dialectic of personal interactions among members of a social group, in this case, students and teachers, and assists in describing the specificities of the action observed. It considers that the fundamental units of analysis are the sets of relationships and the processes through which the action takes place. The unit of analysis must be an interactional situation that occurs in a dialectical relationship and that takes place in a sequence of events that unfold in a given social, historical, and temporal scenario. Therefore, the entire event must be considered and none of its parts can be understood as an isolated entity.

Ethnographic research is especially interested in significant aspects that cannot be obtained directly from informants, which is why direct observation as the main data collection tool is so important. Through observation, researchers can generate inferences about habitual actions, judgments, and evaluations of the participating subjects, actions that often operate outside of conscious thought. According to Mattos and Castro (2011), some of these actions are so common and automatic that they are not made available to researchers through data collection techniques such as interviews or questionnaires. It is only by revisiting the records and in subsequent interviews that researchers can check the meaning of such actions with the informants. Thus, researchers have the opportunity to make sure that what they analyzed matches the informants' understanding of the act.

As ethnography does not have one single meaning, it is worth mentioning what was done during the fieldwork of this research. For 6 months, the researchers were openly present, that is, with the knowledge of teachers and students, observing classes, the everyday contexts of the school, listening to what was said, and gathering materials. In total there were approximately seventy-six hours of recording. All of this focusing on three cases only, the courses already mentioned, aiming for an in-depth investigation. For the purposes of this article, video recordings, their transcripts, and participant observations were prioritized and constituted the main sources of data.

Researchers like Geertz (1981), Erickson (1993) and Mattos and Castro (2011) point out the importance of the instruments used for data construction in ethnography: participant observation, interviews, photographs, and video recordings.

The video recordings allowed us to perform a microanalysis of the interactions. Focusing on the school and the classrooms, this work allowed us to highlight specific scenes involving teachers and students. After a thorough analysis of the scenes, we were able to verify the issue of interaction both specifically and more generally, its dynamics, and the

social relationships involved. Furthermore, the transcripts of the videos converted data into text, facilitating the analysis. This process was based on the content analysis[3] technique as defined by Bardin,

> a set of communication analysis techniques aimed at obtaining, through systematic and objective procedures of content description, indicators (quantitative or not) that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception (inferred variables) of these messages. (Bardin, 2011, p. 48).

With the help of software *Atlas.ti* version 7.0 (of that time – 2015-2016), the data transcribed were coded and categorized. According to Melo, Netto e Lima (2024), coding is the movement of signifying the material, giving meaning through registration and content units, which can consist of words, groups of words, characters, events, objects, or themes. Categorization, in turn, is the moment in which the elements of the same set are classified under a generic title because they have meanings in common.

The student participation category was created based on the following codes: i) interest, ii) interaction, iii) teacher-student, iv) student-student interaction, v) student mobilization, vi) discomfort, vii) confrontation and conflict. The codes: i) teacher feedback, ii) care, iii) teacher-student interaction, iv) resource, v) relaxation, vi) invitation to participate, and vii) presentation gave rise to the interaction strategy category; whereas the codes: i) conversation, ii) murmur of voices, iii) agitation, iv) delay, v) fatigue, vi) cell phone, vii) going in and out, viii) distraction, and ix) leaving early were classified under the barriers to learning category. These three categories will be discussed below.

Ethnographic research has frequently been used in classroom studies (Mattos; Castro, 2011; Cox; Assis-Peterson, 2001; André, 1995). Although the school space is familiar to the vast majority of people, this type of research favors the exercise of making the familiar strange. These singularities could go unnoticed to a unreflexively gaze, which would hinder the exercise of making the field being studied strange. Ideally, the work would involve long-term observation and participation in the setting that is the focus of study with the purpose of becoming familiar with the routine patterns of action and interpretation that constitute participants' everyday world. The focus of this research is to discover the types of things that make a difference in social life; emphasis on *qualitas* more than on *quantitas* (Erickson, 2001)

Within the scope of this research, we privilege classroom microethnography, particularly concerning aspects of face-to-face investigation. Here, face-to-face relationships are considered in the terms of reciprocity and complementarity among the studied actors.

[3] For more information on how we develop content analysis in our research at the Laboratory of Inclusion, Symbolic Mediation, Development and Learning, of the Faculty of Education and the Graduate Program of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, see the article Advances in content analysis in education research, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7213/1981-416X.24.080.AO12.

The reciprocal dimension refers to alternating and sequential relationships throughout successive moments of real time. Interacting partners take each other's actions into account retrospectively and prospectively. The researcher's perspective perceives the dynamics of relationships and understands that the subjects' actions are interconnected. This means that one's contribution depends on the response, even if non-verbal, of the other, thus composing the dynamics of face-to-face interaction.

The complementary dimension involves the relationships between simultaneous verbal or non-verbal actions of interacting partners. At any given moment, interlocutors consider what others are doing, have just done, or will do next. The behaviors of listening and speaking occur simultaneously and synchronously, each partner completing (and complementing) the other's action.

More than knowing the data collection and analysis tools, in ethnography, we see the importance of developing an ethnographic perspective, a reflexive gaze that accompanies researchers both in and out of the field. It seems to seek estrangement in various routine situations, whether in research work or in the personal/family sphere. Thus, we seek theoretical support in the work of Erickson (1993), Spradley (1980) and Mattos e Castro (2011). In the case of microethnography in the classroom research, this gaze will necessarily be focused on face-to-face interactions.

Erickson (1993) suggests that researchers ask questions about the organization of face-to-face interaction. These questions help researchers focus their gaze on the event. How can we know when someone is angry, happy, or being ironic? How can we know when something new and important is about to happen in an event? How do people recognize each other and react to disruptions in the social order of interaction? How are positive and negative sanctions behaviorally enacted, and what is sanctioned? Whereas Erickson suggests questions, Spradley (1980) organizes an analytical data matrix in which space, objective, act, activity, event, time, actor, object, and feeling are crossed to form questions that guide the organization of face-to-face interaction. This table serves as an aid and should not be considered as a closed instrument. We understand that adjustments can be made to adapt the questions to the reality of the field and the research objectives.

According to Morgan (2005) and Schwandt (1994), symbolic interactionism lies within the interpretivist and socio-interactionist paradigm, which aims to understand the world of lived experiences through the perspective of those who live in it. The symbolic-interpretive perspective focuses on the organization from a predominantly subjectivist position, seeking to appreciate and understand the meanings of interactions. Such a perspective combines and contributes to the microsociology and ethnographic microanalysis studies. Symbolic-interpretive research methods often employ ethnographic techniques (e.g., participant observation and interviews) and result in narrative descriptions and case analyses.

Symbolic interactionism sees reality predominantly as a field of symbolic discourse. Thus, it restricts attention specifically to its basic assumptions, which indicate that the social world is permeated by symbolic relationships and meanings sustained by a process of human action and interaction. This theoretical-epistemological framework is always open, reaffirming changes through the interpretations and actions of individuals. It is also embedded in a network of subjective meanings that support actions and materialize their meanings (Mendonça; Vieira; Espírito Santo, 1999). The reality thus conceived does not comply with pre-established rules, but rather with a system of significant actions.

The epistemological assumptions of symbolic interactionism postulate understanding the nature and symbols through which individuals negotiate their social realities. This is an epistemological position that rejects the idea that the social world can be represented in terms of deterministic relations in favor of a view that knowledge on, and the understanding and explanations of social relations must take into account how social order is created by human beings so that they are meaningful to them.

The assumptions about human nature guiding symbolic interactionism see human beings as social actors interpreting their roles and defining their actions so that they have meaning for them. In this process, individuals use language, labels, and routines to create impressions and other culturally specific modes of action. By doing so, subjects contribute to the interpretation of a reality, as the world where human beings live is a world of symbolic significance.

According to Blumer (1986), the term “symbolic interaction” refers to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it occurs among human beings. This peculiarity of human interaction consists in the fact that subjects interpret each other’s actions, rather than just reacting to them. An individual’s response to another’s action is based on the meaning that the former attributes to that action. In symbolic interactionism, social life is seen as an unfolding process in which the individual interprets the environment around them and acts according to this interpretation (Bryman, 1992). The author outlines the three premises of symbolic interactionism: i) human beings act toward things and other people in their environment based on the meanings that these things have for them; ii) the meaning of such things derives from or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one’s peers; and iii) these meanings are established and modified through an interpretive process.

Thus, ignoring the meaning of the things toward which people act is seen as falsifying the behavior being studied. The concept of situation definition has been used as an instrument for understanding the bases of action, in addition to providing awareness of the implications of different definitions for human behavior. Before acting, the individual goes through an examination and deliberation stage, which informs the direction to be taken.

Symbolic interactionism conceives society as a process and understands that the individual and society maintain a constant and close interrelationship and that the subjective aspect of human behavior is necessary in the shaping and dynamic maintenance of the social self and the social group (Godoy, 1995). This conceptual framework helped us in the task of seeking meaning for the data found in this research. We used symbolic interactionism in the analysis of interactive processes characterized by dialectical socializations that, by nature, are never completed but are rather in constant movement.

4 Discussion of categories and results: participation, interaction, and barriers to learning

The participation category focused on students and represented the combination of codes related to interests, teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, mobilization of course participants, the discomfort felt, confrontations and disputes, and their respective registration units. It was described as the action taken by students in interaction with teachers, asking questions, making inquiries, completing an example or the teacher's statements, actively participating in class.

The interaction strategy category focused on teachers and their collaborative didactic planning, with codes related to teachers' feedback to students, the care provided, the interaction between them, and the resources used in class. It was described as personal in nature, characterized by the search for means and methods to achieve the proposed objectives.

The barriers to learning category focused on both students and teachers with the following units of meaning: conversations in the classroom, murmur of voices, moments of agitation, delays, clear signs of fatigue, use of cell phones in the classroom, going in and out of the room, distraction, and leaving early. It was described as moments when something happened indicating unique feelings about the class experience.

From an epistemological-methodological perspective, participation designates interactive action among subjects. We understand that the interactions established between students and teachers in particular are intrinsic elements to the research to be conducted. The structures of participation differ in at least three dimensions: i) number of people speaking at a time, only one or more than one; ii) types of participants' roles; that is, whether all participants have equivalent roles; and iii) the number of conversational floors, only one or more than one. Each of the dimensions has two possibilities: there is only one or more than one person speaking at the same time; all participants have equivalent roles or not; and there is only one or more than one conversational floor. In this context, conversational floor is defined as the space/time in which a speaker is speaking, that is, someone's turn in the

conversation. In a classroom, there may be only one or several conversational floors happening at the same time (Erickson, 1993).

Understanding how communication takes place and how the interaction is structured among speakers in an encounter is of vital importance for interpreting the nature of this participation structure and how representative it is of everyone and not just those who hold the floor at a given moment in an encounter. That is, when someone monopolizes the conversation, it may mean there's asymmetry of power that mischaracterizes participation as something mutually shared.

Goffman (2012a) also points out that social interactions are encounters; gatherings in which the focus is on what others are doing. The boundaries between the encounter and the external world are fluid; external influences are not confined to them. However, the actions in the context of encounters have a life of their own, they are parts of the social environment immediately connected to them. This has been denominated by researchers as local production. In encounters, the actions of the various partners are articulated sequentially and simultaneously. Reciprocal actions are articulated sequentially, for example, in pairs of questions and answers, in which the question asked by one partner requires a response by the other in the next conversation slot. Complementary actions are articulated simultaneously, for example, when the listener responds by nodding while the speaker is speaking. In short, social action is seen as collaborative and interdependent.

Let us analyze scene 1, case1. Other scenes like this were witnessed by researchers and had the same outcome, a missing out on the opportunity to reflect on theory and practice, ideal vs. real. In this interaction, the roles are hierarchically unequal, however, the student, with his inquiries, destabilizes the teacher's planning and definitely interferes in the development of the class. In the course: Cost-efficiency in Bidding, Professor Roberta[4] explained about standardized drafts for public work contracts using a slide deck that was being projected and spreadsheets that were available on the computers arranged on the individual desks.

Goffman's (2012b) interactional perspective explores the idea that interaction is improvised by the social actors involved, although there is a tendency for participants in the interaction (student and teacher), who listen carefully to what one is saying or doing to the other, to understand the present and past moments during the course of interactive events. For the author, the emerging organization of this exchange is eminently endogenous to the interaction and the active understanding by participants of how events occur. Relational roles, social and hierarchical identities are aspects of the total pattern of social organization, which the author calls the participation framework.

[4] All names have been changed.

Scene 1 represents a classroom where adult students are seated at their desks with individual computers. Only the heads of six students are visible, their bodies are covered by the computer monitors. One of the students, positioned in the center of the scene, raises his hand. The others look down.

The students were in the room, paying attention, following the textbook and looking at the computer and the teacher, until this student, João, sitting in the center of the group, breaks the silence, raises his hand and asks about the Maracanã stadium project.

This represents a frame break: João raises his hand and, without waiting for the teacher to finish what she is saying, asks a question that breaks the class's ritual, addressing a topic that was not related to what the teacher was discussing – the differentiated contracting regime:

> Student João: So... in general terms... I don't know if you're going to talk about the Maracanã project. Everyone saw it, it started with an amount. The project was designed a long time ago, but then it had to be amended two or three times...
> Professor Roberta: – Yes...
> Student João: – Why does that happen?
> Professor Roberta: – But this has nothing to do with the DCR (differentiated contracting regime).

The direct interaction between the student and the teacher lasted ten minutes, during which they spoke over each other, used expressions of justification, and made criticisms. He brought up the example of the Maracanã project, an important soccer stadium in Rio de Janeiro, to illustrate a poorly executed cost projection by the public administration.

When he brought the example to question what was being discussed in class, that is, the step-by-step process of creating standardized drafts of public work contracts and how to fill out the spreadsheet, he stated that the contract designed and signed for the Maracanã renovation works had glaring flaws. His words put the teacher in a position to bring the class a bit closer to the reality experienced by the citizens of Rio de Janeiro. According to Goffman (2012c), the impression that interacting subjects have of the real character of reality is what matters. In this case, what was being explained about the draft of contracts for procuring public works and other services did not match what was socially observed.

When João speaks, he involves the other students by saying – everyone saw it, showing that he considers the actions of others, both retrospectively and prospectively, and that he is counting on the support of his peers. What the student was trying to ask was: How can contracts fail so much, given that they are, in principle, agreements accepted by both parties? This question had to be digested by the teacher, who did not know how to respond.

Professor Roberta: – Yes...
Student João: – Why does that happen?
To which the teacher replies asking him the question instead.
Professor Roberta: – Yes... And why does that happen?
The student reinforces the question.
Student João: – Yeah, why? I wanted you to...
The teacher starts to answer.
Professor Roberta: – Several reasons... basic project failure...
The student retorts, interrupting the teacher.
Student João: – Ah... but is it that simple? I mean... We should be saying... it was a glaring failure!
The teacher agrees.
Professor Roberta: – Right…

After agreeing that there was a failure, the teacher, seeking to save her face, i.e., her role as a teacher and as a professional, resorts to her work experience and says that – it might be that it hasn't been as long as you are saying.... They interrupt each other and the student keeps his inquiring stance, even though he says, with the intention of easing the criticism, – the class is wonderful and all, but in these major works, we are very far from being able to make fewer mistakes. Goffman (2012a) points out that, when the rule of saving face is broken (in this case by the student), it becomes essential to restore order, or at least try to. The teacher's response is – but what we really try to do is get these things stick in your heads and we try to codify them.

It is of interest to microsociology to understand how people recognize each other and react to disruptions in the social order of interaction. In this case, the teacher's face was partially restored when she sought to resort to her school/academic experience or even, in this case, to her everyday work context. The student's violation of the rules had the effect of destabilizing the interaction. In the teacher's eyes, making "these things stick in your heads" seemed like the way to restore order. However, as critical educators, we cannot fail to consider that simply depositing information, in a banking manner, becomes the role of untrained teachers.

The student, on the other hand, spoke loudly and over her, in an inopportune way of interacting, perhaps feeling empowered by his mature age or professional position, as this is rarely seen with children. Interrupting the teacher, making sure his voice was heard, expressing his indignation is a privilege of the brave. Only three other students participated in this discussion with brief contributions, and among them, only one supported his colleague. In the end, the teacher responds, tempering: – It is complicated! Nothing was resolved, the two sides remained separated from each other, the entire institutional work seemed to be placed in an unreal dimension. And what did the students learn?

Perhaps they learned that there is a significant gap between planned and actual, a fact also observed in the debate itself. The plan was to teach a lesson based on the slides being projected and, on the spreadsheet, available on the computers on the desks. The fact is that a question came up and it was not about the spreadsheet itself or about a concept being discussed, but about how the knowledge presented related to students' lives. How often do students refrain from asking this question in class? How many students remain silent, blaming themselves for not being able to make sense of the information that is so out of context? Then teachers shoot knowledge-arrows at their students, which, after piercing their bodies, leave behind only the wound they made.

Just like participation, collaboration is a necessary condition for teaching/learning and must be enhanced in a well-founded and lasting way. However, it is always a danger to talk about improving interaction strategies that involve students, teachers, schools, and classrooms, since collaboration, trivialized in the use of terms, can be merely cosmetic and not express the genuine mutual sharing and exchange of experience.

This reasoning supports the understanding that both students and teachers require an extra effort to strengthen collaboration and enable the exchange of mutual help (Mattos; Castro, 2011). In the context of these alerts, defining collaborative parameters is necessary; the amount of work that collaboration requires and its equitable distribution; the symmetry of power and hierarchical uniformity among collaborators; the combined articulation of efforts within a collective; democratically defined space and time; solidarity and empathy among peers; the sharing of ideas, procedures, and results are just some of the parameters that define effective collaboration in the production of collectively designed work.

According to Erickson (1993), when we attempt to teach, if there is no collaboration from those who are learning, we take the risk of distorting teaching to the extent that it becomes almost unrecognizable, preventing any possible types of learning, like in the previous scene. If this assumption is correct, then collaboration is not an option we should choose only if we want more enjoyable or current teaching. More precisely, collaboration can and should be the essential condition for the success of the professional practice of teachers and students.

Scene 2 shows a classroom with empty seats and desks with computers and monitors on them. There is only one student seating at his desk in the background. The teacher is standing next to him. They both look at the exercise on a sheet on the table. This scene represents a moment when, at the end of the class, the teacher empathizes with the student and helps him complete the assignment. Noticing that everyone else had already left and that he remained at his desk, she approaches him, and an individual contact is initiated.

The student makes a move to hand in the incomplete assignment, as he was unable to finish it. Attentive to this situation, Professor Rosa puts herself in supporting role and asks:

– Did you manage to do it? To which he replies: – Kind of. She then explains: – It's not easy, some people here are already used to it... Trying to reassure the student, Professor Rosa asks: – What don't you understand? He doesn't answer but shows her the sheet with the incomplete exercise. Professor Rosa identifies his difficulty and helps him.

Based on the interaction established, with proximity between the subjects, Professor Rosa has the opportunity to rescue a precious value of education: mediated teaching. Confident in her position and role, she monitors and collaborates directly with the completing of the assignment. She asks questions that she knows the student can answer:

> Student Francisco: – This is about transportation, but what does it mean?
> Professor Rosa: – It's about transporting materials over a certain distance, the distance from the construction site to the warehouse, okay?
> She then goes beyond just asking questions and starts explaining.
> Professor Rosa: – So, you have information about this distance, 60 km.
> Throughout the process, the teacher reminds the student that he must carry the goods to the site and then bring the truck back. Then, she gives him the answer: – So you will double that distance."
> Francisco responds: – 120.
> She confirms: – 120.
> The exercise involves calculations using units of measurement and the teacher returns to the value found, 120, and reminds him that it is 120 kilometers and that – it is tons multiplied by kilometers.
> Then, she asks the student: What is this ton? It's the weight. How much is it?
> She answers the question herself: – 1,5. Looking at the student, she says: – So you already have 120.
> The student responds with the result of the calculation: In this case, it's 180.
> The teacher confirms his answer: "That's right!" And she adds a small correction: – 180, ton-kilometers, right? Which is the unit of transportation."
> Francisco goes back to the figure of 60 kilometers and the teacher reminds him of the calculation: – kilometers (120) times tons (1.5): This is 60, so this is 120 times 1.5. It's distance times weight, what you did here, 120 times 1.5 equals 180 ton-kilometers, okay? All of this times the cost of freight transportation. She continues: – That's correct. Now you have to do this multiplication here. And the rest here you just fill in with information at the beginning of problem.
> The student thanks and confirms: – So, I should add 16%?

With the teacher's explanation at the appropriate tone of voice and because she showed interest in his learning, the student was able to understand the assignment. This did not happen during class or with the help of his classmates, but when he was alone, in a safe environment with the teacher. Wrapping up her explanation, she guides him to the next steps: – then you will find the cost of your construction work, right? By adding all of these items together, you'll get the cost of the construction work. Then there is a percentage of

benefits and indirect expenses (BIE) that should be calculated based on the cost. The cost plus the percentage equals the final price of the work, okay?

Professor Rosa seats at her desk and waits for the student to finish the assignment. Franscisco then gets up and walks to the teacher's desk. He hands in the assignment; his expression suggests he wants to justify himself. This does not go unnoticed by the teacher who comforts him: – Don't worry. We will review it calmly later. The student emphasizes how grateful he is: – Thank you so much", to which the teacher replies: – I hope I helped a bit." The student replies smiling: – You did, of course!"

An analysis of this framework highlights the fact that, in the interactive process, the manner of speaking often becomes more important than what is said. In keyed frames, where there is asymmetry of power – in this case, the knowledgeable teacher and the uninformed student – there is no frame break. Unlike scene 1, in this scene the student and the teacher are in agreement with each other, and their faces and facades are being saved. The student is unable to complete the assignment and the teacher collaborates with him. The classroom rituals are being fulfilled according to the expectations of the interacting subjects. The teacher teaches, the student learns – even though during the class this student had felt quite inappropriate, unable to complete the assignment or ask for help.

In this intact frame, even the speaking turns are respected. While one speaks, the other listens, and vice versa. Everything seems to be under control and following the rules previously and even unconsciously shared between the parties. Each person's contribution depends on the other's response. They try not to lose their own face and to save the other's, completing and giving meaning to each other.

What stands out in this the scene is the fact that only two people take part in it. The room is empty, everyone has already left. Only Francisco and his questions remain. Could this frame have occurred had the other students been present? Most likely not, if we consider the different conversational floors as the space/time in which the other participant in the interaction speaks, that is, has their turn in the conversation. This shows how dynamic the interactional process is, as it involves both disputes over interactional moments, as well as their retreat, silences, disappearances.

Scene 3, case 3 is the most emblematic of this category, and it has occurred several times. It refers to moments when the teacher corrects/comments on the exercise done by one of the groups into which the class was divided. During most of these moments, the students who are not part of the presenting group get distracted and do not pay attention to what is being said by their classmates and by Professor Carlos.

Scene 3 shows a classroom arranged in 5 rows of 4 desks each. Students are seated in the third, fourth and fifth rows, leaving the first two rows empty. The students check their cell phones and get up, going in and out of the room. Only one student looks at the teacher.

This fact was observed both from revisiting the videos and fieldnotes and from the transcripts of the dialogues. Perhaps if the teacher's posture or interaction strategy at this moment had been different, all the students (or at least a larger portion of them) would have participated in the debate, which, unfortunately, did not happen. Precisely for this reason, we understand that in moments when the discussion with only one group took place, the others had their participation and, consequently, their learning hampered. In the analyzed frame, Professor Carlos says (addressing the class) that internal control has four objectives.

> Student André mentions the exercises and continues helping Professor Carlos, reading the material on the topic, produced by his group the previous day.
> Students Bento and César talk, as do students Marcos and Vinicius.
> At this point, student Maria enters the room. Student Bento starts talking to student Beatriz, takes notes on his notebook, turns around and asks her something.
> The room is filled with a murmur of voices.
> Student Beth says something to student Cintya who is sitting right behind her and then asks student André something.
> Student Maria takes a piece of paper from her bag.
> Meanwhile, Professor Carlos continues commenting on the answers read by the presenting group.
> Student Bento uses his cell phone.
> Student Beth discusses an excerpt from the exercise with student André, while the teacher continues commenting.
> Student Pedro goes back to reading. Students César, Paulo and Caio talk about something in César's notebook and laugh. They seem to be comparing notes or reviewing something.
> Professor Carlos comments on the procedure's manual, the topic of the class.
> Student Bento continues his cell phone. Student Tomás enters the room.
> Professor Carlos asks student Ana, from the group of municipality X (another group) to present her group's work.
> Student Bento stops using his cell phone, talks to student Beatriz and then goes back to his cell phone.
> Student Marcos rubs the back of his shoulders, showing some fatigue, and crosses his arms.
> Student Bento puts his cell phone aside and leaf's through the course material.
> Student Beth asks student André a question and then answers her cell phone.
> Student Beth leaves the room to talk on the phone.
> Student Ana resumes reading the exercise.

Considering Goffman's microsociology "in any face-to-face encounter, participants are continuously proposing or maintaining frames that organize discourse and guide them with regard to the interactional situation" (Goffman, 1998, p.107). However, such frameworks do not necessarily refer to the class but to the interactions established among classmates, considering the class situation. During the group presentations, the teacher interacts

face-to-face with the students or at least with those who make up the presenting group. He also makes comments and asks questions.

We believe that for everyone to interact with each other as a large group, therefore, it would be necessary to identify and establish a framework for everyone. And this did not happen. At this point, we see a frame break and the establishment and maintenance of new frames. As we saw in Goffman (2012a), such a break can have repercussions in at least two ways: i) fabricated frames, or ii) keyed frames. In the former, there is an asymmetry of power expressed when the interacting subjects agree that one knows something that the other does not. Examples are when Beth comments something to Cintya who is sitting right behind her and asks something to André, or when Bento uses his cell phone, or when Marcos crosses his arms, or even when Beth answers her cell phone and leaves the room.

In keyed situations, when individuals are aware that reality has been or is being transformed, they create strategies, often feigned ones, to deal with the situation. This is the case of parallel talk, leafing through the material or even laughing at a joke. To minimize the barrier to participation and learning, it is essential to understand the game of interactions. In principle, efforts should be made for interlocutors to recognize the main frame and the ones that derive from it, through the metamessage contained in every utterance, which signals what is said and done or how what is said and done is being interpreted. “In other words, the frame formulates the metamessage from which we locate the implicit meaning of the message as an action”. (Goffman, 1998, p.107).

Therefore, in every interaction, interlocutors interpret the messages and give them meaning (or meanings!). Being in a classroom, with desks, blackboards or whiteboards, in the presence of a teacher and other fellow students is enough of a metamessage for students to interpret it as a class. In this case, we recall that each framework has rituals that, in principle, should be respected. What can we see in the scene in question?

There was a clear frame break. By their inappropriate behaviors, the students show that they had misinterpreted the situation. In this scene, it was difficult to follow the speaking turns, as everyone was speaking at the same time, albeit quietly, and they were distracted checking their bags and cell phones, entering and leaving the room. In this scenario, what could have been learned? What are the students telling us? Students usually do not engage in situations like these. In this case, the concern with saving face is more directed toward classmates sitting next to or behind them than toward the teacher. As public servants in the municipalities of the state of Rio de Janeiro, these students got time away from work to get training, but even though they were physically present, they did not engage and, as a result, learned very little.

5 Final Considerations

The objective of this article was to analyze the interactions between students and teachers in the classroom context in order to understand their importance in the dynamics of the educational process. We recognize that these interactions do not always run smoothly, as they often involve difficult confrontations. The discussion regarding the analysis of face-to-face interactions was supported by the study entitled *Inclusion in Public Administration: a study on the role of a school of government in the development of more inclusive cultures, policies and public practices*, carried out between 2015 and 2018, based on an ethnographic research approach, over a period of 6 months.

Video recordings were made of the following three courses at the School of Government (our research site): Cost-effectiveness in Bidding, Internal Control, and Cost-effectiveness in Bidding for Administrative Contracts – Procurement and Services, topics of great interest and importance for managing public spending, totaling 76 contact hours. These recordings were timestamped, segmented, transcribed, coded, and categorized based on Laurence Bardin's Content Analysis technique (2011), which allowed for a microanalysis of face-to-face interactions.

This work highlighted three scenes/cases that showed interactions between teachers and students, focusing on student participation, interaction strategy, and learning barriers. We examined interaction both specifically and generally, its dynamics, and the social relationships involved. The theoretical, epistemological, and methodological frameworks contributed greatly to understanding the nature and symbols through which individuals negotiate their social realities.

For the purposes of this study, we chose part of Goffman's work (2012a, 2012b, 2012c) on the notion of reality, frames of social experience, and saving face. We also incorporated the methodological framework of ethnography by Geertz (1981), Erickson (1993), and Mattos and Castro (2011), and symbolic interactionism by Bryman (1992), Godoy (1995), and Blumer (1986).

The first of the scenes chosen for this article, named Scene1/Case1, presented an example in which a student/course participant asked a question about a topic the teacher had been discussing, interrupting and questioning her. This was perceived as a frame break as it disrupted the class ritual and, consequently, the teacher's lesson plan. While analyzing this scene, we wondered how often questions are left unasked in the classroom, or how often students remain silent and refrain from asking those questions, blaming themselves for not understanding the content. We identified factors that limited effective collaboration in the implementation of a work plan that can include students, highlighting difficulties in some of the interactions established. Furthermore, we observed the absence of collaborative param-

eters of horizontality in interactions, definition of speaking space and time, as well as solidarity and empathy among subjects. With the frame break caused by the student's questioning, everything else seemed to crumble, unfortunately.

Scene 2, case 2 showed an episode at the end of a class where the entire group had already left except for one student who had questions about a given exercise. The teacher worried and helped him with the assignment. The individualized contact seemed to collaborate to an intact frame, that is, the actions were in accordance with the expectations of the participating subjects, manifested in the respect for speaking turns, in the effort to save facades, both the teacher's and the student's – the teacher teaches, and the student learns. The attention given by the teacher and the way she handled the situation shows the importance of tone of voice, proximity, and genuine interest for the success of the interactive, and in this case also educational, process.

Scene 3, case 3, in turn, addresses an episode that was seen several times: students distracted and not paying attention to the interaction between the teacher and a particular group of students. This was because the assignment at stake was carried out in small groups, which led to a clear frame break. Through their inappropriate behavior, students demonstrated that they had misinterpreted the situation, perhaps believing that the episode did not concern them, did not interest them, or was not part of the content to be learned. At that moment, there was no identification and establishment of an interaction frame for the entire group of students, which could greatly contribute to the teaching and learning process. As a result, new but small frames were formed. In this scene, it was hard to follow the speaking turns, as students were distracted, checking their bags and cell phones, and going in and out of the room. Here, we wondered what had actually been learned.

Finally, the study allowed us to identify the importance of analyzing face-to-face interactions, in this case, between students and teachers, especially those from the student's perspective, as they provide important insights into understanding the processes of exclusion and inclusion in the educational field. It highlighted the importance of developing new studies on interactions to seek answers to the questions posed, especially those about what students have to tell us.

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Received in November/2023 | Approved in April/2024

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