



# CHANGEMAKING

THE POWER OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY



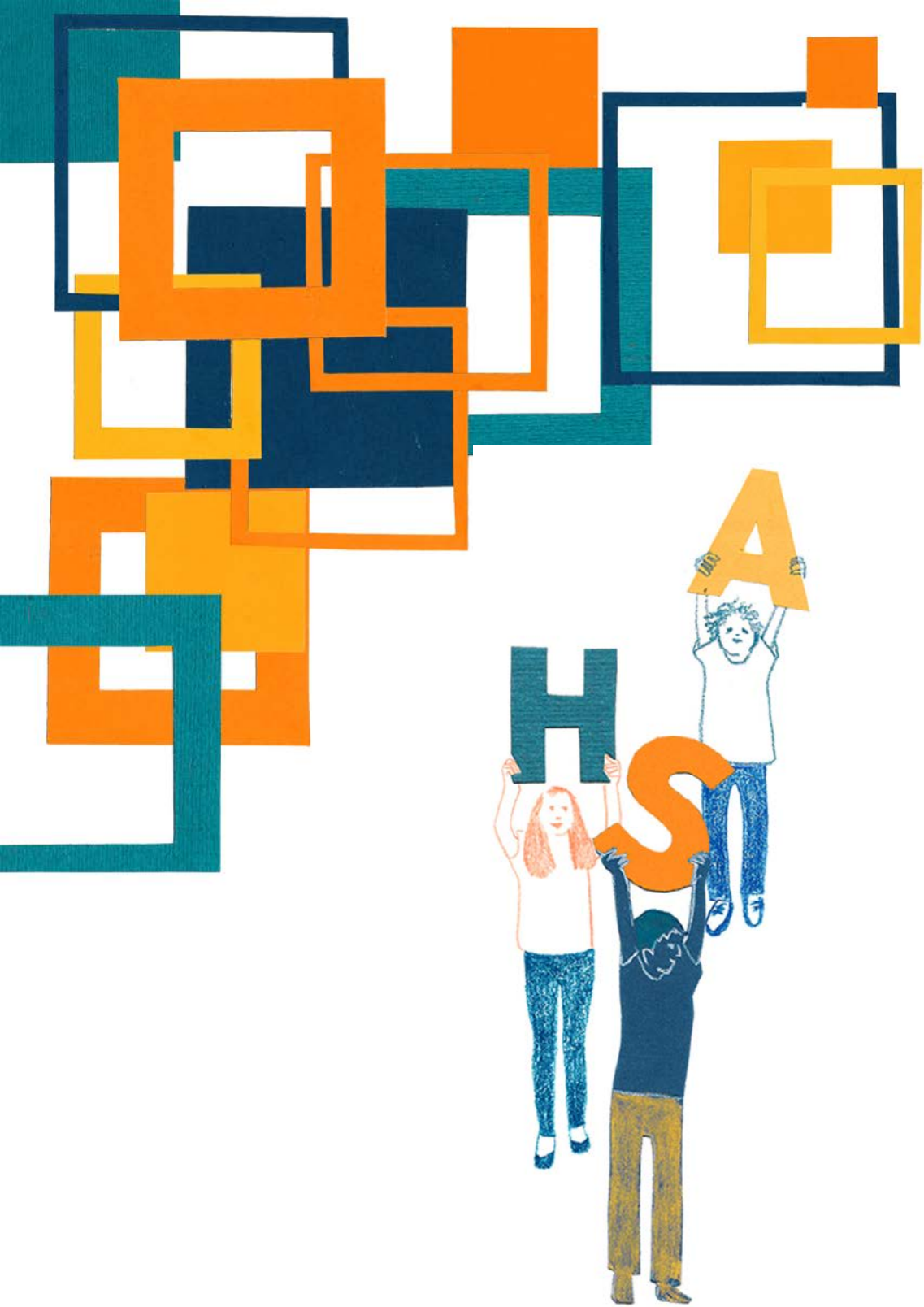
Antonio Lovato  
Carolina Prestes Yirula  
Raquel Franzim  
(ed.)

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## THE POWER OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Protagonismo: a potência de ação da comunidade escolar  
Protagonismo: el poder de cambio de la comunidad escolar

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**CHANGEMAKER SCHOOLS**

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**Changemaker Schools** is an initiative of Ashoka, a global organization that brings together the first and largest community of social entrepreneurs from around the world.

Born out of the belief that everyone can be a changemaker, the program sees the school as a special place to provide experiences capable of developing individuals with a sense of responsibility towards the world. Children and youth willing to take an active role towards the necessary changes that are needed, in different social settings and supported by tools and values such as empathy, teamwork, creativity and protagonism.

The program began in 2009 in the United States, and from then it has spread to 34 countries. Today, it consists of a community of over 270 Changemaker Schools, 15 of them in Brazil.

In Brazil, the initiative was launched in September 2015, in co-leadership and execution with the Alana Institute, a nonprofit organization, founded by Ashoka Fellow Ana Lucia Villela, that bets on projects that seek to guarantee the conditions for the full experience of childhood.

After a careful evaluation process, school teams are invited to engage in a community with various leaders that share the vision that everyone can be a changemaker. This triggering community consists of journalists, university professors, representatives of government and the citizen sector, experts and artists.

This triggering community sees the child and the youngster through an integral perspective on development, in which the body, emotion and cognition are not separate, and all are essential to the formation of free, independent individuals, capable of relating and acting in the world in a more empathetic manner. The experiences and trajectories of the schools and the other members of the Changemaker Schools community inspire and help broaden the social demand for this kind of education.

Along with this community, Ashoka and Alana Institute accept the challenge of sharing a common message: education is changing in various part of the country and the world. We will all be a part of this great and necessary movement.

More than creating or replicating a new program or curriculum, we are talking about fighting for a change in the vision and mindset of education. About creating and promoting, together, a new framework for education and people's lives and roles in society.

### **About Ashoka**

Ashoka is a global social organization founded in 1981 that brings together over 3,300 social entrepreneurs (Ashoka Fellows) in 84 countries. It aims to collaborate in the construction of a world in which Everyone is a Changemaker, where any person can develop and apply the necessary skills to solve the main social problems we face today and in the future.

### **About Alana**

Alana is a nonprofit civil society organization that brings together programs that pursue conditions for children to fully experience their childhoods. Founded in 1994, Alana has been maintained by an endowment fund since 2013. Its mission is to "honor the children".

# INTRODUCTION

As a result of the talk *Protagonismo na Educação: Por uma Sociedade de Sujeitos Transformadores* (Protagonism in Education: For a Society of Transformative Individuals – <http://goo.gl/JAvNc6>), which took place in November 2016 in São Paulo, this book aims at shedding light on the discussion about protagonism in education. In the following articles architects, sociologists, educators, students, journalists and other actors committed to the construction of a fairer, more sympathetic and friendly reality express their viewpoints regarding what it means to be a protagonist and how protagonism unfolds among children and young adults. Each author took part in the talk, and they also provide important input to the discussion about the role of the educator and the school in enhancing protagonism within the school community.

The decision to start thinking about this topic emerged from the main belief expressed by Changemaker Schools Program: everyone is able to become a

transformative agent and, in order to do so, he or she needs to have access to an education that contemplates abilities such as empathy, creativity, team work and protagonism.

Even though these abilities are as important as mathematics or learning a second language, they are still neglected by many schools, by those involved in education, and by families, which demonstrates the importance of this book and of other actions taken by the Changemaker Schools Program, such as the organization of talks and the acknowledgment of schools that focus on these abilities, thus helping promote changes in society.

Established in Brazil in 2015, Changemaker Schools Program aims at revealing that education is opening itself to new dialogues marked by beliefs that put people at the center of the learning process by looking at them as



protagonists of their own lives, their territory and of the world. It is a great challenge. To face it the Changemaker Schools relies on a broad and diverse community, consisting of school teams, social entrepreneurs, businesspeople, researchers, journalists and experts from a variety of areas related to education who, together, seek to build an understanding about the education we want.

This publication is the product of this joint effort. Just as it happened in 2016, when we published *A importância da empatia na educação* (The importance of empathy in education), which was also the result of a conversation among the triggering community, this second book, composed of 10 articles, presents a shared viewpoint of protagonism in education.

The first text, written by sociologist Helena Singer, suggests that protagonism should be a premise for all relationships established in the school community—and should not be discussed only as something to be developed by students. Singer calls attention to the importance of public policies for protagonism; she deems it impossible to assure protagonism to students without assuring it to teachers as well. Singer reminds us that in Brazil there seems to be a great distrust of the teachers' ability—the amount of ready-made textbooks available to teachers which demands that they do nothing more than a “bare minimum” is an example. Singer provokes: How can one help a student become a protagonist if the teachers themselves are not?

In the second article, Abdalaziz de Moura—one of the founders of Serviço de Tecnologia Alternativa - Serta (Alternative Technology Service), a transformative school located in Glória do Goitá, Pernambuco—shares his thoughts on the choices made by the school staff leading to the understanding of protagonism as something that bears no relation to competition, and that becomes

more powerful when it exploits the potentialities of each subject. Continually thinking through the idea of protagonism is one of the responsibilities of Serta.

In the following article, Maria Regina Martins Cabral, co-founder of the NGO Formação - Centro de Apoio à Educação Básica (Formation - Support Center for Basic Education) and a social entrepreneur at Ashoka, in São Luís, Maranhão, brings to light the political moment that Brazil was going through in 2016, looking at the students' occupation movement as a remarkable demonstration of youth protagonism. She argues that, in order for protagonism to happen, schools need to take a democratic stance and be able to welcoming different voices and opinions, a position that faces the great challenge of building and cultivating more horizontal power relations.

Adriana Friedmann, an anthropologist and expert in playing, takes the readers to the universe of the children—how to make sure children are protagonists of their own histories, of their territories and of their world? In the fourth article of this book, she discusses “children's protagonism”, still a very recent idea among scholars in the area, and defends that children's protagonism occurs spontaneously no matter where they live or grow—in the most diverse families, schools, public spaces. But for protagonism to happen, it is necessary that adults let go of their desire for total and absolute control over the steps and expressions of children.

Architect and researcher, Beatriz Goulart also sheds light on the power demonstrated by the occupation movement led by secondary students in 2016, and considers the school as a place of encounters, able to motivate a collective protagonism. According to her, who has already been responsible for designing architectural projects in a variety of schools, physical space is also important for the development of protagonism. Thus, in her article,

Goulart invites us to re-signify time and space, transforming the school in a true house for everyone.

Carolina Pasquali, head of communications of the Instituto Alana (Alana Institute) and responsible for the project *Criativos da Escola* (Design for Change - Brazil), also discusses the idea of protagonism as a collective experience. For Pasquali, it is a mistake to think of protagonism as a solitary act—by saying what they think, people express themselves based on their relationships with others. To illustrate her ideas, Carolina presents the experiences of the *Criativos da Escola*, which encourages children and young adults to transform their realities, putting themselves as protagonists of their own histories of change.

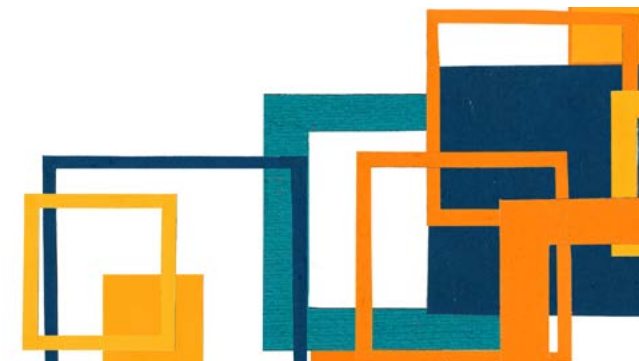
The seventh article was written by the educator Luis Santiago Perera Cabrera, principal of Guayamurí School—located in Margarita, a Venezuelan island—and who is part of the global network of transformative schools. In his article, Santiago discusses the role of schools in face of the challenges of a new reality in which students have access to information full time through the different means of communication available nowadays. According to Santiago, schools must teach what is important beyond their premises, that is, things that can effectively be applied on daily life. The great mission of the school would be to transform society through education, and he provides us with examples based on his experience at Guayamurí School, where students have the opportunity to work in microcompanies and offer a service to their community.

Alejandro Bruni is the principal of the La Salle Educational Center, in Malvinas Argentinas, 7.5 miles northeast of Córdoba, in Argentina. The school is also part of the global network of transformative schools and it is situated in an area of extreme poverty and social vulnerability. The La Salle Educational

Center has Paulo Freire, and his idea of popular education, as one of its main inspirations. Alejandro states that without knowing the school's surroundings, its demands and its problems, education can never make sense to students or to educators. Thus, the school has the obligation to visit the community, so that educational proposals can be discussed together among their different actors. For him, the challenge to promote protagonism must be addressed through this constant dialogue with the community.

In his second contribution to this book, Abdalaziz de Moura, from Serta, Pernambuco, opens a discussion on the urgent need to reconsider today's teaching-learning methodology. Moura presents a problem faced by Serta and concludes that finding a solution was only possible because there is room for debate. Students, teachers, principals and the entire school community took part in the situation and, together, found different ways to obtain a new outcome for a problem that, at first, seemed insurmountable. Once again, the collective nature of protagonism is analyzed.

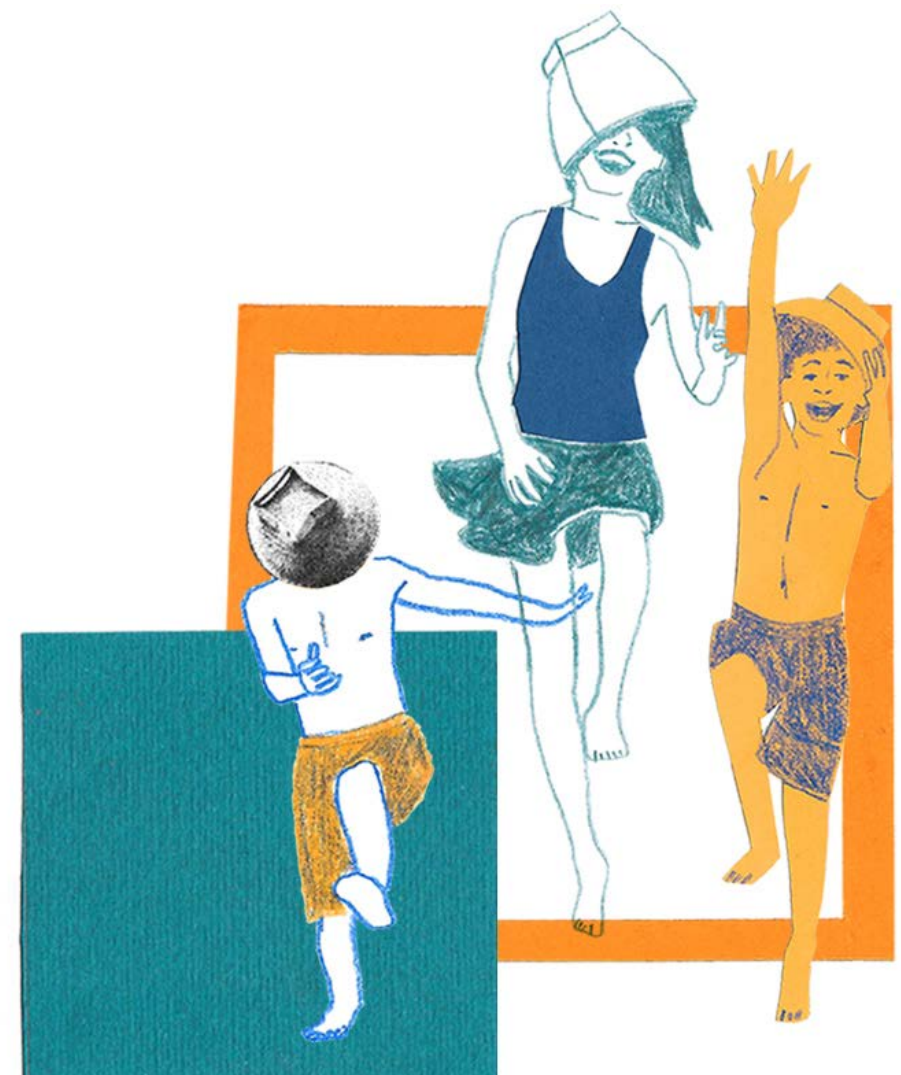
In the tenth and final article, the book gives voice to Carolina Hikari, a student at Instituto Federal do Paraná - IFPR, (Federal Institute of Paraná) campus Jacarezinho. From a student's point of view, she examines the school as a place that should enable students to make the best of themselves. According to her, in doing so, school transforms society, as it allows pupils to find out that they are capable of taking action. Carolina believes that debating issues and being able to make choices are the biggest allies of a flourishing protagonism.



# IN FAVOR OF PROTAGONISM FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND SCHOOLS

by Helena Singer

Sociologist, consultant at the Centro de Referências em Educação Integral (Reference Center in Full-time Education), Singer has a doctorate from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) and post doctorate from the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). She was the Education Minister's special advisor (2015) and head of Ações Estratégicas e Inovação do Sesc – Serviço Social do Comércio (2016) (Social Service of the Commerce). Singer has written books and articles on education and human rights that were published in Brazil and abroad. Helena Singer is member of the triggering community of Changemaker Schools Program.





The predominant educational system in most countries has central governments and their team of experts as its main protagonists. They not only decide the rules that will guide the whole system but also how everything must be done.

In Brazil, for instance, state and municipal governments are responsible for basic education. They are in charge of building schools, hiring teaching staff, designing the curriculum, purchasing pedagogical material<sup>1</sup> and scheduling the school calendar. But they always have to follow plans and policies established by the Ministry of Education. Private schools have more flexibility, but in general the protagonism here belongs to the principals, who control all the aspects of the school.

As soon as everything is decided, teachers get involved. Once at school, they are led to predetermined areas; they welcome groups of students—who have already been organized in groups—; they receive course outlines (previously prepared) and materials. It is in this setting, which expresses not only the government's but also the principal's deep distrust of teachers' abilities, that they have to ensure the learning of their students. It is said that "once classroom door closes, teachers are in charge" and, from that moment on, everything is up to them.

There is no room or space for pupils to be "in charge." After arriving at school, they are sent to a classroom, sometimes to a specific chair, where they must remain for a specific amount of time. All their steps have been determined by someone else—places they can go, disciplines to study, the material they are to use and even how their learning is going to be evaluated. If they do not

1. It is the federal government responsibility to determine a national curriculum for schools (Base Nacional Curricular), but the curriculum in the schools should be their prerogative, having the national curriculum as a parameter. However, most of the time, the curricula in municipal and state schools are the same and they often purchase materials, course books and teaching methods that teachers have to use.

achieve satisfactory marks, many will blame teachers, who in turn will blame families (who do not "work with them") and students' lack of interest. It is therefore not a surprise that students do not feel motivated to study in such a context. In fact, anyone who has seen the passion for learning that children have at a very young age, knows that schools suffocate this will.

The poor results achieved by this system have encouraged different organizations and sectors of society to look for new ways to transform students into protagonists of their learning, and for protagonism to be effective it is crucial to break with this tradition. And the starting point should not be looked for in government offices, even if their staff was genuinely concerned with the learning process and its quality. Students themselves must be the starting point—curriculum, timetables, places and staff, everything should be based on their interests and rhythms.

Students have to become the center of a process that will lead them to their development—intellectual, emotional, corporeal, social, ethical. And the key to this process—both in its beginning and in its conclusion—is the pupil's independence. Students become independent when they are able to learn and investigate any topic of their interest; when their relationship with themselves and with others is healthy and respectful; when they develop self-care behaviors; and live in accordance with their own values and beliefs.

Freedom of choice is paramount to gaining this independence, and that is what independence as a starting point means—one must believe in the students' desire to learn and to develop themselves as human beings. Only then it is possible to create an environment where students are able to make choices. Following their paces, interests and trying to reach their own goals, students project their own learning trajectory.

Nevertheless, this does not happen spontaneously, but rather through a meticulous learning process of organization and planning mentored by ed-

ucators. By distributing their time among individual activities, shared spaces, school projects in and outside school premises, students develop the ability to plan and perform tasks; and it is through these tasks that they will learn to select projects and become aware of the skills they need in order to grow and take responsibility, which are fundamental aspects on their path toward independence.

Learning the process of organization and planning is made possible by time schedules, flexible curricula and shared spaces—what is currently being called “personalization”. Learning times and spaces cannot be fixedly predetermined, nor can they be segmented. Both become part of the students’ learning trajectory, which can begin in classrooms, where topics of special interest to them are discussed, but will not be restricted to these classrooms.

Once lesson plans are prepared, classrooms will be first connected with other school areas such as the library, the gymnasium, the laboratory and the schoolyard; secondly, with neighborhoods, streets, stores, houses and public squares; then with other places in the city, like museums, historic sites, theaters and landmarks. Through the Internet, the students’ trajectories will connect their schools with all the spaces around the globe linked to the topics they are studying.

Considering that this process is guided by the interest of the pupils, the time dedicated to studying is not restricted to the time spent in class during working days. Following what was planned, the excitement of learning encourages the individual to face the challenges imposed by his or her research and the difficulties that are part of the acquisition of independence, thus dedicating as much time as necessary to achieve the desired goal.

During this process, pupils can rely on the educators supervising them; they will also come across different people who will share their knowledge, experiences and passions with them. There are moments when students are the

ones who teach. In collaborative groups, pupils teach their classmates about specific subjects or areas they already mastered. In other particular projects, they can instigate their classmates by demonstrating a great excitement regarding certain subjects or proposals.

The possibility of sharing knowledge relies on the coexistence between those who are different. Sharing a new finding will only make sense when it is done with someone who does not have that knowledge. It is disparity that enriches projects and studies and stimulates a positive and careful interaction among students. The interaction with people from different ages, gender and cultures—enabled by the connection of all those different spaces, times and actors—make students pay attention to the Other, to someone else’s experiences, preferences and cultures. This keen interest for what is different is a central aspect of one’s social development.

As important as placing the student’s interests, rhythm and learning style in the center of their growth is the development of their responsibility for the group. Such responsibility is achieved through collaborative groups, collective projects, involvement in community projects and participation in school space management.

By being part of the group who will set the rules, students become aware of themselves and also of their rights while valuing democracy and the common good. This is part of the passage from subordination to independence, transforming selfish and authoritarian attitudes into respectful ones that promote solidarity and caring.

But in order for students’ protagonism to happen it is necessary that their educators also become protagonists of their own work. The word “educator”, in addition to meaning a higher position than the one of the teacher, is also more consistent with this new understanding of the relationship between pupils and educators. Based on this understanding, the role of the educator

is not to transfer knowledge but to create and to offer conditions that will increase pupils' learning and their full development.

As stated by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogia da autonomia (Pedagogy of the Oppressed)*, “to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge.”

Technologies and telecommunications brought a new dynamic to the way we communicate, read and, especially, learn. With widespread and spontaneous knowledge in different languages and means of communication, educators today have more resources to put themselves as mediators of a whole variety of educational opportunities.

However, the idea of an educator who guides students through the path of knowledge is more than two hundred years old. Before Paulo Freire, the French educator Célestin Freinet (1896-1966), and the Polish scholar Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), among others, had already played the role of mediators of development processes, establishing dialogical connections facilitated by autonomous and affable meetings in which everyone had the chance to participate.

From that point of view, it becomes clear that educators are authors; they are in charge of mediating particular trajectories to which they devote special attention, as if they were conducting a research; they also try to find a variety of resources and create new possibilities to be presented to pupils everyday. And this is what educator's protagonism means. And schools, through this process, are also transformed, becoming protagonists of their own political-pedagogical project. Schools become a collective project, common to students, educators and families, all of them interested in providing education, in transforming themselves while they also transform the place where they live and coexist.

When that happens, teachers are no longer isolated in their classrooms but see themselves as members of a team who has a collective project within

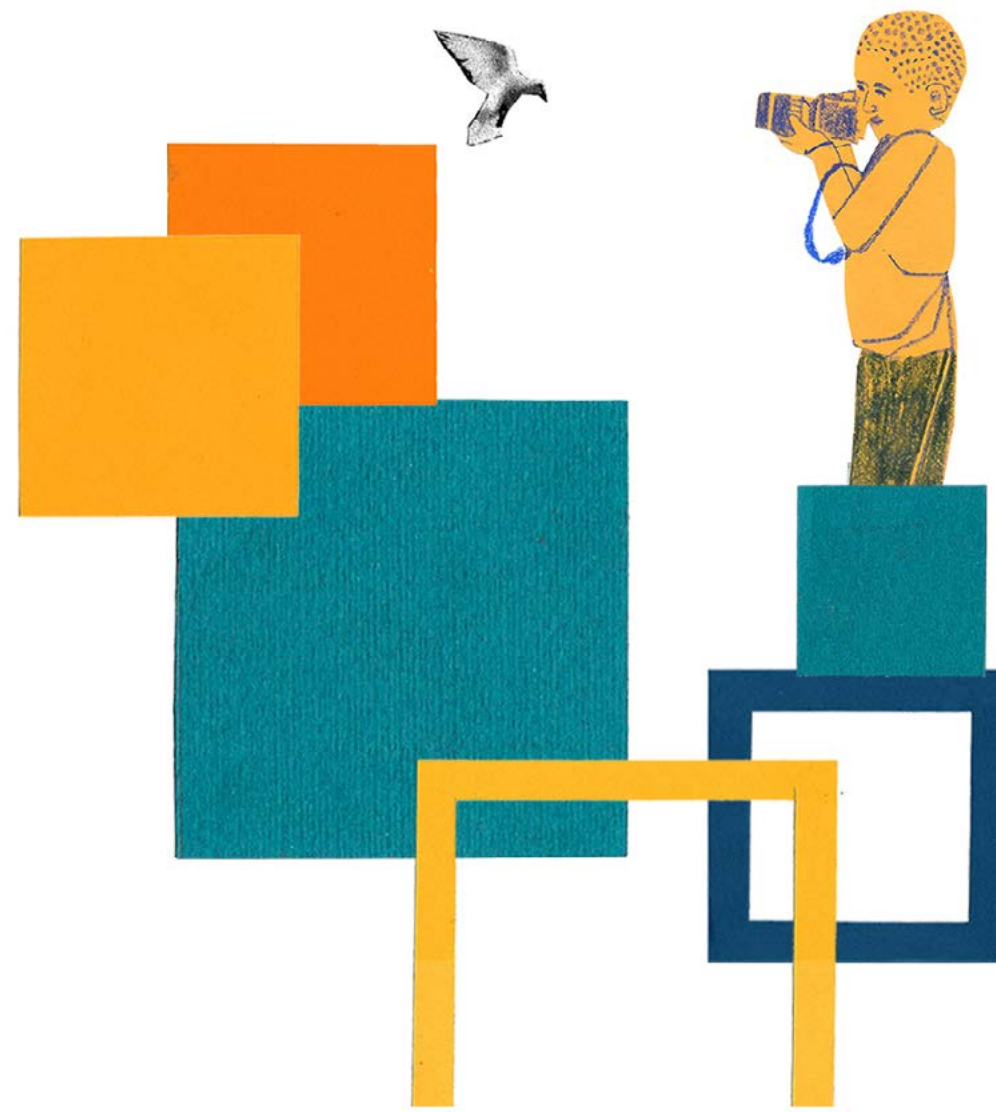
a community. The sense of project, collectiveness and community will create psychoprophylactic environments where human beings will be able to mature as individuals, develop their talents and, finally, find happiness. But for that to happen, the so-called system—with its job positions, careers, resource management, evaluations—will have to focus on the organization of school teams that are connected with the community they work with and with independent institutions that are able to carry out their political-pedagogical projects based on the needs of those who are part of them, in an attempt to find a common ground.



# BROADENING THE CONCEPT OF PROTAGONISM USED BY SERTA SCHOOL

by Abdalaziz de Moura

Popular educator, coordinator of the agroecological course offered by the Changemaker School SERTA (Serviço de Tecnologia Alternativa-Alternative Technology Service), in Gloria do Goitá, Pernambuco. This paper intends to contribute to the debates on protagonists' profile as well as on an external evaluation of the work carried out by SERTA, in 2002.



The importance of broadening the concept of protagonism has been stressed several times by different scholars. There are descriptive definitions that cover its features but there are a number of scholars who disagree with the concept currently in use. This paper is an attempt to broaden the concept of protagonism used both by SERTA School and institute Aliança com o Adolescente (Alliance with Teenagers). It must be read, complemented and reviewed.

### Historical and linguistic references are required

To properly understand the term “protagonism”, it is worth understanding two similar ones, commonly used as synonyms: “militant” and “leader”. Each of them has a different root: “protagonism” derives from Greek; “militant”, from Latin; and “leader”, from English. In both literature and history they were all used in specific situations. Diverse historical and political contexts have given each word certain connotations. To better understand each one we shall have a look at them.

#### Militant

“Militant” derives from the Latin intransitive verb *militare* and has the same root as “military” and “militia”. Nevertheless, “militant” is more commonly used in contexts not related to the military field. It has been adopted by the church as well as by political and social movements to refer to people engaged in or committed to causes or to missionaries promoting religious or political beliefs. Militants are deprived and devoted people who not only sacrifice their lives for a certain cause but also devote them to it. In an organization, they are always part of the elite group, they are the ones who can be trusted, who carry out internal activities and look after the political representation of a movement.

In both Brazil and Western Europe, the term was widely used by the Catholic movement Ação Católica (Catholic Action) that made use of the See, Judge and Act method in order to indoctrinate its members. Ação Católica,

first with the Juventude Operária Católica (JOC) (Catholic Labor Youth), founded by Father Cardin, came up with a method for instructing militants and thus carrying out their mission to recruit members of the working-class community. This method was then applied to farmers (JAC–Juventude Agrícola Católica–Rural Catholic Youth), secondary students (JEC–Juventude Estudantil Católica –Secondary Students Catholic Youth), university students (JUC–Juventude Universitária Católica – University Students Catholic Youth), and independent workers (JIC–Juventude Independente Católica–Independent Catholic Youth). Ação Católica did not work only with young people but also with adults. The literature available until the Second Vatican Council was very disseminated, especially in French. There were many translations and publications in Brazil that could be considered militants’ manuals.

Because the militancy of socialist currents was already intense in the areas where Ação Católica was promulgating its ideals, the church was already developing the method of recruiting militants. This is the reason why the Brazilian Labor Union and other social movements made extensive use of the term *militant*—to identify their leaders and those willing to take risks whenever necessary.

Historically, it was not something new for the church to use terms from outside its scope to explain its reality. “Parish” and “diocese” are themselves borrowed from organizational structures of the Roman Empire. *Militant* referred to the laymen’s mission, while *missionary*, to the mission of religious men. The militancy in the sectors mentioned above helped developing all those movements. However, this practice not always focused on positive and efficient attitudes. The excessive attention devoted to leaders brought about a series of problems that nowadays no one, consciously, would like to repeat. To illustrate this, we can point out the following:

- The detachment between militants and the lower class. Militants are so absorbed by the movement’s cause that they forgot about the masses.

- The predominance of speech. As soon as leaders become proficient in public speeches and in methodology, they end up developing an ideological language that is unfamiliar to its community. This can be seen in union movements in which militants are able to deliver an inflammatory and convincing speech before the authorities but are unable to engage members of their own local area.
- Militants have the tendency to always speak on behalf of the community, since they believe they are supporters of the cause.
- The tendency to think of oneself as being always right. Militants are so involved in the struggle and in the analysis of the methodology that they believe their interpretation is the only correct one. They must have the last word and do not accept questioning; everyone else has to follow their lead.
- The reluctance to exert self-criticism. Militants are always judging everyone else but themselves. They easily and furtively begin to take authoritarian measures before their community.
- The historical impatience. Members of the masses evolve at a different pace than militants, which invariably leads the latter to demand more from followers than these can actually offer.

## Leader

As we have seen, the word “leader” has a different root; it derives from English and it was first used in Portuguese during the Brazilian industrial development. According to the Aurélio dictionary, the word *líder* (Portuguese word for “leader”) is defined as: 1) the person who is in charge or who guides, no matter the procedures, companies or the implementation of new ideas; 2) the guide, chief or leader who represents groups or opinions; 3) the individual, group or association that is in first place in any sort of competition.

Under the American and English influence, the word started being used in companies and social movements. While the term “militant” relates to the area where the person lives among the masses, peasants, university staff and students—, “leader” conveys the idea of team, company, group; hence its link with leadership, competition.

As it happened to “militant”, “leader” also became subject of scrutiny, study and training. Courses for those interested in becoming leaders were—and still are—widely offered. A great variety of companies and institutions, ran by people with different political views, began writing guidelines and booklets to instruct their staff in leadership.

The excessive attention devoted to leaders and to some training techniques brought about problems that one would like to avoid, such as:

- Prioritizing instrument over ability. Since the courses were offered to everyone, many thought that it was the activities trained, and not their own abilities, which transformed them into leaders. As a result, many people considered themselves leaders and demanded leadership roles. In the 1970s and 1980s, one way of criticizing those in charge of the courses was calling them (and their guidebooks) “*engorda cabeças*” (“head-fatteners”). In an ironic tone, it was said they used to put a lot of “fat” and knowledge in the heads of people who were not able to assimilate the learning.
- Dependence on the leader. The leadership position was so overestimated that everyone else depended on the leader, making the position itself less autonomous.

## Protagonism

“Protagonism” derives from Greek and it was used in theater to identify the first—in importance—actor in a play. The second actor was called “deuteragonist” and the third, “tritagonist”. There isn’t yet a literature that

sheds light on the term “tritagonist”, as there is for the first two; and there are no guidelines to help people become protagonists as there were for militants and leaders. However, more and more people are trying to make use of this term to define new profiles and relationships.

Since SERTA and the institute Aliança com o Adolescente started their partnership, members of SERTA began using the word “protagonism” to refer, mainly, to teenagers and young people engaged in the circumstantial and personal changes taking place where they live. We decided to incorporate the term to our vocabulary not only because it is new but also because its meaning continues to be expanded.

There are some features of protagonism—and protagonist—that can be highlighted, such as:

- It does not refer to competition but to solidarity, and it implies the existence of a second agonist, or actor, a third one and so forth. Everybody needs to be aware of each others’ task, since no one can be replaced.
- Being aware of your role does not allow you to foster dependency. The others are not simply followers, or the masses, or opponents, they are actors playing a variety of roles (authors, agents), and they are always subjects—not objects—of the protagonist’s action.
- Protagonists do not act in a rural area or among students or workers but in a territory. One does not become the protagonist *of* a group or a social class but rather *in* a territory containing different divisions. One does not look at an isolated division but instead at the different divisions in their unity and diversity.
- A protagonist does not represent a section, a social movement or a group, nor does it defend the interests of those who are underpriv-

ileged and oppressed, though he or she can help them fight for their rights. Protagonists do not act for the underprivileged, but with them.

- Protagonists do not give or receive orders from a chief or a leader. They create teams, groups, come up with guidelines, courses of actions—they evaluate others and themselves. They also provide testimonials and give their “example, time and presence” and do not speak more than necessary.
- They are as determined as a leader or a militant, but protagonists are also patient: they wait for people to start walking, speaking, acting and seeing by themselves.
- Protagonists develop their work based on people’s abilities and potential, rather than on their problems and needs. They transform problems into topics of investigation, analysis and action, providing, therefore, more solutions than problems.
- Protagonists present proposals, not only criticism; they intend to become part of the solution to the issues they tackle. They do not look for someone to blame when something has not yet been done or has not been done properly. Protagonists want to solve the problem.
- They are encouraged not generalize, but rather to look at the world holistically. Protagonists do not just look into their own party, church or problem—they are aware that there are other possibilities, different parties and different churches.
- They are able to act interdimensionally, building bridges, mending fences between reality and topics apparently disconnected: work and environment, citizenship and art, politics and technique, education and development, rights and duties.

- Protagonists value religious beliefs either related or not to a specific religious creed. They cherish self-esteem, self-confidence and self-image as means of promoting change. They believe they are capable of promoting change and that they can also contribute to other people's change, as well as to the changes in their surroundings.
- They feel the need to master useful tools—knowledge, technologies, reading and writing, mathematics and the use of computers—so they can help promoting changes in the places where they live.

At first glance, these qualities might be seen, at least for some people, as naïve and devoid of a more critical view, as if the world we live in were a place free of conflicts and disputes; one could go as far as saying that both SERTA and Aliança are helping shape naïve young adults. However, it is a matter of paradigm. According to one paradigm, we can be naïve people; according to another one, we can be critical, efficient, helpful, independent, productive, strategic people.





# HIDDEN PROFUSION

UNVEILED BY THOSE WHO TRANSFORM  
TERRITORIES IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTIES

by **Maria Regina Martins Cabral**

Fellow of Ashoka and KFLA, Maria Regina Martins Cabral has organized projects in education as means of developing territories. She has a PhD from USP/US and is the cofounder of Formação-Centro de Apoio à Educação Básica (Formation-Support Center for Basic Education). She is also the CEO of the IMAES Institute (Instituto Maranhão Amazônia de Ensino Superior-Maranhão Amazônia Institute of Tertiary Education) and the head of FFI-Formação Faculdade Integrada (Integrated University Course). Maria Regina Martins Cabral is member of the triggering community of Changemaker Schools Program.



Headlines and breaking news (“protagonism on the streets”; “gag law”; “we will not be silenced”; “apolitical school”; “modifying school”) revealing the contradictions of a society in effervescence. This could be a positive debate, as diversity of opinions and ideas is always healthy for a democratic society, but that would only be true if the society we live in were not ill, if it were not a mere reflection of the historical dominance of some over others—the world we live in is definitely not an egalitarian one.

The current hatred that runs through the open veins of Brazil against those who believe that protagonism should be part of practices that help people develop critical and omnilateral thinking (so that transformed, they may be capable of transforming other people’s lives) send us back to 1964, when a then 43 years old Brazilian scholar was forced to flee the country.

Who was this scholar? Paulo Freire. Why was he forced into exile? Because he was in favor of a transformative education. Freire argued that the literacy learning should not simply mean teaching people how to read and write; he believed that, through that learning, people should be able to read any text critically, making sense of its social use and understanding the meaning of every single word learnt during their lifetime.

Freire dreamt of teaching people to read simultaneously both the words and the world, thus getting the most of those who had been transformed and were ready to transform others. By problematizing every word/topic, a deeper understanding of the accumulated knowledge throughout the history of mankind is gained. Words are multifaceted and they unfold a variety of connotations, and this means trouble to those who want to keep potential historical subjects invisible and unseen.

For a small part of society, traditionally in charge of the political and economic power, having people of the lower classes mastering this knowledge is dangerous; therefore, it is not the school that must be apolitical, but those who do

not share this knowledge that must be gagged. In the movie *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986), directed by Margarethe von Trotta, Karl Liebknecht, in a different historical context, unveils this reality, putting us close—through similarity—to the ideals of those who are willing to silence so many voices inside schools.

[...] What you want is not an apolitical youth but that this youth become political the way you want. You are not trying to get them out of the parties’ modus operandi but you fight for having the primacy of putting in their minds your political ideas. And because the free youth movement does not share your ideals, you all fight under a false pretense. Yes, gentlemen, it is a combat under a false pretense that you are engaged in when you talk about the lack of politicization of our youth, and it is an enormous hypocrisy when you, those who politicize youth, but in the sense that is best for you, tell us: “Oh, this poor youth is in no condition of making politics without putting themselves in danger!”

This intention becomes clearer when the mainstream media, reporting the protests and the occupation movement in schools that took place recently in Brazil, define those who can and cannot protest; who has the right to be seen protesting live on national television across the country; who can be protagonist and subject of transformation.

In the recent occupation events in schools all over Brazil, contradictory ideas came together. On one side, we have students involved in the occupation and those who supported it alongside with principals, teachers and parents in favor of the movement; on the other, the ones who were not involved and were against it. Difference of opinions is key to democracy, but this one-sided media coverage masks history and forges a broad set of manipulated ideas that harm the progression of democracy.

In this sense, the role of transformative schools is important because it is through that process that we will be able to have an educated society.

According to Dewey, “education is a social process, an evolution. It is not about preparing for life, it is life itself.” From early ages, investing in developing transformative people in an educational process based on the lives and works of everyone involved in it is what makes a better society possible. And how can these processes be maximized in order to have subjects prepared to build this society? How can a school be an open and dynamic space where people expand their educational development?

The French scholar Schaller (2007), on the participation and training of learners for a transformative society, inquires: “How can we encourage mutual participation and collaboration between groups and individuals in order to create conditions for communal practices and decision making?”

A school—any school—is a place of learning, of acquisition of knowledge for many people, where there is plenty of diversity, since diversity is part of the world, and also key to building democratic practices; and these practices take us back to horizontal or circular thought, but not to a unique and vertical one. The vertical way of thinking and acting does exist, but I want to look more closely at a more collaborative one.

In a democratic school, all protagonists work at the same time to create and build incessantly a network of learning, generating a series of connections and relationships. “Each part of this network [...] can become an event, a bifurcation, something that will trigger new possibilities for the realization of a communal action.” (Schaller, 2007)

In 1999, I cofounded the NGO Formação—Centro de Apoio à Educação Básica (Formation—Support Center for Basic Education), in São Luís (MA), where I still work. We proposed the establishment of networks in schools and their vicinities to plan and put into practice projects to transform schools into places of development area. Based on that, we created the Centros de Ensino Médio e Educação Profissional (Secondary School and Professional Education Centers)

(CEMP) in an area called Baixada Maranhense. The goal was to maximize links and shed light on the diversity of thoughts, on the maximization of learning, on the promulgation of good methodologies, but especially on the great possibility of transforming what apparently was scarce in hidden profusion, that is, on opportunities to solve issues in low income territories. Transformative knowledge lies in the relation between subjects and the place where they live, places of learning; knowledge needs to be discovered from the outside and from the inside of each subject, so that what has been apprehended and built can be shared and reach places where other subjects live, thus making the organizations stronger, multiplying educative communities and creating new networks.

The networks of people and organizations of society—whether the ones created within each school, the network of transformative schools, or any other network—are social, cultural, educational networks that operate not only symbolically but also in the communication field, as well as in the dominance and/or “liberation” fields.

These are networks that, above all, consist of symbolical languages, cultural restrictions, power relations... Just as biological networks, they are self-degenerative but what they generate is immaterial. Each communication creates ideas and meanings, and they will originate other associations, restoring the entire network. (Capra, 2008)

From the place where I work I can see how hard it is to create networks of transformative subjects, since it is difficult to carry out radical democratic practices; sometimes, we might risk ending up with a more vertical practice or having it destroyed by other forces. To illustrate this, I present four risks that may arise:

- 1) The communication within schools becomes symmetric instead of asymmetric. When symmetric, equal structures are needed; a dominant thought to guide other ideas. One single person has an idea and it reaches the others without any contestation.

2) All the power of the networks, based both on policies and on politics (not necessarily related to parties but to citizenship), tends to be concentrated in the hands of those who will perpetuate themselves in leadership positions, preserving colonial practices of hegemony of one single group.

3) The network becomes nothing more than a gathering of corporate friends who will maintain the *status quo*.

4) And finally the risk that the network will develop into some sort of church-like fundamentalism in which the leaders put into practice the indoctrination of its members—who might disagree, but who will stay silent.

Communication is asymmetric during democratic practices—it is not something vertical that starts with one person and that is conveyed to others as if they were empty spaces who must accept the messages passively. No, it presents interactions. In order for communication to happen, difference is needed. There are learning networks that are against the concentration of power or the transformation of the network into a gathering of friends. There is resistance, the desire to change.

According to Schaller (2008), it is important to deepen the tension that exists between verticality and horizontality. He defends the idea of “means participations” and “process participation”. The first one is useful for mobilizing different resources, seeking results, which is characteristic of networks; the second intends to reassure people’s involvement so they become critical. Participation in this case is a process toward debate, confrontation, becoming part of an attempt to fight for a communal world.

Dialogical practices as well as horizontal relationships are extremely challenging to everyone involved in these networks and who face different ways

of learning, with different contents, methods and places. For example, the principal of a school or the leader of an organization in charge of a network and who comes from an authoritarian political tradition seats with another leader—maybe with an opposing point of view—to have a conversation on common ideas and to find a way to maximize the organizations. This is a very challenging situation, especially when the conversation involves all the stages of a proposal, from its very beginning. (Cabral, 2013)

During a talk at the CEMP—São Bento, Rosar (2004) stated the importance of listening to the other in the process that will lead us to a transformative education. “It is likely that an attitude mediated by an ethical commitment to the process of human emancipation and that allows all those involved in it to listen to others and to themselves, listening to the voices of those young people who had their voices silenced, will help create transformative subjects.” A school that emancipates people so they can transform realities, and that believes in its leaders—and leaders who trust the school and the democratic process of the network—will be an unprecedented experience that many will want to take part in and support.

# CHILDREN'S PROTAGONISM

by Adriana Friedmann

Educator with a PhD in Anthropology of Childhood, Adriana Friedmann is also a researcher of lives, languages and cultures of children. She has been working as a consultant for a variety of organizations offering her expertise to those working with issues related to children and childhood. She is the author of many books and articles, such as *Linguagens e culturas infantis*, *Quem está na escuta?*, *O brincar na Educação Infantil: observação, adequação e inclusão* and *A arte de brincar*. Adriana Friedman is member of the triggering community of Changemaker Schools Program.



The term “protagonism” derives from the Greek words *prōtos*—first in importance—and *agōnistes*—competitor, contestant. In the theater and in the movies, this term is commonly used to refer to the main character of a story. Figuratively, protagonist is the one who plays the main role in a literary piece of work or in a particular event.

In sociology, “protagonism” points out to political factors and conveys the idea of a more democratic approach to social action. Children’s protagonism is a recent movement that has been attracting the attention of several groups of society. It emerges among children of different ages and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds who are able to express their thoughts, feelings, life experiences, opinions, demands and preferences. Children’s protagonism takes place on a daily basis no matter where they live and grow—in the most diverse families, communities, schools, public spaces, and social organizations. Wherever there are children, children’s protagonism can be found.

Children are those who most demand and require attention from adults (we are not considering protagonism here in its strictly “political” sense), and it can be said that they become protagonists when they express themselves in a variety of ways, such as in speaking, playing, art, music, dance and sports. Children’s protagonism has an ethical, social, cultural, political and religious trait, and it invites adults and decision makers to rethink not only childhood’s social status but also the role played by children in society and in different cultural backgrounds.

The acknowledgment of children as protagonists has its origins in certain circumstances—diverse though synchronic—that emerged in societies of different countries in the past decades. Social science researchers and scholars have been contributing, since the 1980s, to the conceptualization and recognition of children as social players and agents of their own lives.

Studies on children’s languages and cultures from numerous societies and contexts have enriched the repertoire and the understanding of the impor-

tance of children’s protagonism, and helping people have a deeper grasp of their situation through the voices and expression of children themselves. These studies have also given significant input when it come to reassessing children’s role and rights in society, as well as the actions, practices and projects that are part of their daily lives.

The importance of listening and understanding children, providing them with space and opportunity to express and develop themselves, has been gaining recognition among not only childhood health and culture activists but also educators, parents, principals, social organizations, institutes, media, politicians and business people from different areas. Children of all ages, of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, have been expressing themselves in their daily lives, and in different social environments, through a variety of means.

During the first years of life, children are permanent protagonists. They are the center of attention and, in a variety of ways, express who they are and what they experience. Nevertheless, as they grow older, this protagonism changes as soon as adults—parents, tutors, caregivers and society as a whole—begin to interfere. These interferences, stimuli, propositions may have either a positive or a negative impact on their lives. A similar impact also occurs when there is a lack of such interferences, stimuli and propositions by way of actions, conveyed contents, knowledge, space organization, time limitation, or when there is no one paying attention to their interests, ideas, longings and realities.

Children’s protagonism changes or tends to disappear when the guidance offered by adults does not take into account diversities of nature, personality, tendencies, talents, multicultural roots, preferences, independent means of expression, difficulties or limitations. Children put their protagonism into practice spontaneously through their ability to voice and place themselves in the world. And they may suffer serious psychological damages which are

likely to manifest themselves through outbursts of anger, signs of violence, hostile or depressive behavior, lack of interest, escape or withdraw from social groups. They can also suffer from psychosomatic disorders and other reactions as well as present an alarming behavior.

Restrictions imposed on children's protagonism can have serious consequences on their development and ability to adjust to life at home, social institutions or other social groups.

Adultcentrism<sup>1</sup>, a trait of traditional societies, is an attitude that has to be reconsidered within the social and educational settings in which children live and mature. Making a decision on behalf of children disregarding their feelings, thoughts, interests, needs in relation to their own time, space, toys, activities, partners; depriving or pushing children away from a variety of opportunities, along with pushing and forcing them to take part in events; evaluating, comparing, rating them or putting a lot of pressure on them—all this cannot, and should not, become the tendency or define parameters when it comes to thinking or to enabling "children's protagonism". This protagonism is the result of a spontaneous movement. Therefore, forcing, compelling or pushing children to partake in certain conferences or situations, or making them say either what adults would like them to or love to hear from them is not protagonism.

It is paramount that adults change their attitude so as to understand different ways in which children express their protagonism—they must interfere less, listen more closely, observe without judgment, consider children's pace, personality, choices and procedures; and they must also accept that children have their own knowledge and wisdom, which are different from those of the adults themselves. All this must be heard, respected, understood and

taken into account for a permanent recreation of their daily lives, a task which adults must undertake alongside their children.

As is the case with young and adult protagonism, it is also important to take into account that the universe of a child contains hierarchies and different levels of participation, as well as diverse responsibilities and leadership profiles.

Children have unique and distinguished ways of expressing and communicating. When we think of protagonism, adults are the ones who must control their own anxieties, learn the language of the children and what it reveals, so as to be able to understand the messages children convey, both consciously and unconsciously.

Providing children with the opportunity to show their protagonism is not necessarily indulging in chaos and lack of control on the part of adults, as many might think. It is a very essential way to enable children, from a variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, to exercise their right to be who they really are, to discover the world around them, to get to know and live with other children, young adults and grown-ups, to discover their talents and develop them.

Letting children become protagonists is one of the keys to promoting healthy societies and it is also a way to prevent psychological and physical disorders, protecting and cherishing the "seeds" that each child carries inside and helping them flourish.

<sup>1</sup> Adultcentrism refers to the decisions taken by adults on behalf of and for children without giving them voice or the opportunity to express themselves.

# LEADING TOGETHER: THE SCHOOL AS A SHARED HOUSE

by Beatriz Goulart

Architect, urban planner and researcher at Cenários Pedagógicos (Pedagogical Scenes) studio, from Grupo Ambiente-Educação (Environment-Education Group) (GAE/PROARQ/UFRJ) and a fellow of the Centro de Referências em Educação Integral (Full-time Education Reference Center). Beatriz Goulart is member of the triggering community of Changemaker Schools Program.





**Protagonism is power.** And, in our recent history, nothing has been more powerful than the occupation movement led by high-school students, in September 2015, as a reaction to the education restructuring proposed by State Education Department of São Paulo.<sup>1</sup>

And without understanding how or why, it seems that in the blink of an eye everything has changed: no one accepts any longer what seemed inevitable (the authoritarian school, the arbitrary hierarchy, the degrading teaching conditions), and everybody demands what hitherto appeared to be inconceivable (the reversal of priorities, public and private, the primacy of the students' voice, the possibility of dreaming of different schools, a different education, a different youth, and even a different society!).

This movement caused such upheaval and rupture that we do not tolerate anymore what we used to, and wish for what seemed unthinkable—the line between what is intolerable and desirable has shifted. This shift in perception opens up not only a powerful range of possibilities for schools, but also for new roles and relations, changing completely our perception of what the school is, to whom it belongs and what the roles of the school and the education are. It is a shift that offers a glimmer of hope, causing cracks in this obscure and closed structure that is the school; threatens its impenetrability, its formality, its form, organization, and order, and that puts the school back in its place as a social environment, away from an extraterritoriality which is historically marked by uniformity, regularity and repetition behind its logic. This appropriation will give the school the opportunity to stop being a system surrounded by artificial objects and superficial actions full of superficiality and that increasingly focus on outcomes unfamiliar to the school itself and to the beliefs of those who are part of it.

<sup>1</sup> For a better understanding of the topic, I recommend the book *Escolas de luta* (Schools of fights), CAMPOS, A.J.M.; MEDEIROS, J.; RIBEIRO, M. M. São Paulo: Veneta, 2016.

This collective protagonism—still restricted to students and some members of their families—is the consequence of a harmonious, organic process derived from an interdependency between actions and actors that is a result of their existence in that place. This solidarity is product of the very dynamism of activities whose definition is due to the place itself.

This is the reinvented area, created by reversing the tendencies inherited from the previous means of production. This is what Milton Santos called *espaços do aproximativo* (approaching spaces), meant, above all, to help with men's liberation and not with their domination.

This shift in perception and in authority that we have witnessed in recent occupation movements in schools and other public spaces is accompanied by a shift in property rights—to whom does this place belong?—towards the right to access and use public places—how do we occupy this space? From now on, the occupation of the public spaces begins to take place based on its empowerment possibilities, making “when” and “how” more valuable than “what” and “where”. Connections and conditions become extremely important, that is, the intervals, the in-between places, the unpredictable and unlikely events begin to play a decisive role in this process.

The force of the protagonism in and from school depends on and interferes in its form and organization, time and space, management and curriculum. And, above all, in how the relationships between its users develop in this context.

As Milton Santos states, the space is formed by a group of undividable, sympathetic and contradictory objects and actions not to be considered separately, but as a unique structure in which history takes place. By cleaning up the school, and finding out what is in its storage and kitchen cabinets, students modify what appeared to be undividable, integrating objects and actions according to new connections—thus, getting their hands dirty, they expand their awareness and horizons of what can be done, in such a way that they, as pro-

tagonists, may reinvent the world with their bare hands, just as argued by the sociologist Richard Sennett in *O artificie* (The Craftsman) (2009).

What we have here is an awareness that, put into practice, not only re-signifies but also redefines space, time and educational action; a protagonism that goes beyond the representation of role, transforming life itself, from the very basic chores; and the joys of tidying up the house, the shared house. In this context, a question arises: Do you think that this free-flowing imagination, as Pelbart (2016) puts it, can only be applied to high-school students? And, from this question, others arise—to which, however, I do not have an answer:

- How does all this affect female teachers?
- What role are female teachers playing? Are they helping the public education in Brazil recover from this serious crisis?
- What was their participation in the occupation movement and in the discussion about these occupations?
- Does the shift in power in schools affect the female teachers? How?
- Students are protagonists of their education, even when they drop out of school. What about female teachers?
- In a school that propagates inequality and exclusion, what do they do in order to change that?
- What do they do, alongside students, with regard to topics that are not part of their role?

High-school students' protagonism adds value-in-use in schools and public places since occupation movements provide a sense of belonging to the school, of treating the school like a house, like home. The school becomes a shared place, a shared house.

The truth is that students are only part of those who inhabit the school. And in order for the school to effectively become a shared and fundamental house, everyone who inhabits it must be a protagonist. In other words, more

than defending children's or young people's protagonism, it is necessary to move forward in such a way that protagonism becomes communal—working together, believing together, trusting. Students, teachers, community. As one! (Sennett, 2012)

Rebuild the school and the world with our bare hands, together. Well-being protagonists.



# IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE A PROTAGONIST JUST ONCE IN A WHILE?

by Carolina Pasquali

Journalist with a post-graduation in media management at the Pontifical University of Salamanca, (Spain), Carolina Pasquali has developed the project Design for Change in Brazil and is the head of communication of the Instituto Alana (Alana Institute). She is also responsible for the project Criativos da Escola (School Creations).



The answer is no, it is not.

Imagine a big screen, just like in a movie theater. It is split in half. On one side there is a group of students engaged in a project and the message conveyed is crystal clear—“All voices matter.” They look excited, curious, committed. On the other side of the screen we see the same group but in a very different situation. Confused and scared, they are not encouraged to take part in the discussions that are relevant to the school. “We will make decisions on your behalf and for your benefit, because we know what is best.” This is the message they receive.

Can these two realities coexist? The answer, based on daily practice, is no. The reason for this is that youth protagonism is not a methodology that can be used and then discarded. It fuels the relationships established between the members of the school community; thus, it cannot be used and then dropped, or put into practice and then abandoned. It is much more a “means” than an “end.”

When we think of protagonism as the *modus operandi*, that is, as a cornerstone of relationship-building, it becomes easy to understand that it is also a collective work. Therefore, it is a mistake to think of protagonism as a solitary act of expression. By saying what they think, people express themselves; nevertheless, there is always a “context.”

When I express what I am, I do so in a context that invites other people to do the same, so we can, together, make that into a collective experience. The unison of our voices, so multiple—since we are all different—culminates in an action that takes everyone to a new and meaningful place.

This is what the children and young people who take part in the project *Criativos da Escola* (School Creations) experience. Thus, they prove—everyday during school practices—that protagonism is completely intertwined with

cooperation. Wishes, life experiences, and information come together to signify knowledge, to solve a problem, to help prepare for a presentation or to discuss issues relevant to the group.

It is the teacher’s job to facilitate this cooperation—among students and between them and the world—, arousing their curiosity, equipping them with tools so they can discover different things, helping them deal with their inquisitiveness and the obstacles they will find on the way. It is a process and, as such, there is no success formula.

In our project we believe that the first step should come from the heart. It is not by chance that the first verb presented by the project is “to feel”. It is through something that bothers, moves or excites us that we open up ourselves to being—ourselves and the others.

In this regard, Paulo Freire is our inspiration: “Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.” Feeling something hardens the challenge, and leaves a distinguished mark on experience.

In a second stage, having established this relationship, the verbs “to imagine” and “to make” are introduced—investigation and action. And, once again, it is a collective protagonism. Imagination leads to a variety of options, possible or not, resulting in different findings that broaden students’ perspectives.

Acting is more powerful. Responsibilities are shared. One cannot just offer an idea to the group so as to, later, be excused from the task of carrying it out. Therefore, being a protagonist means taking responsibility for what you offer to others. It means building a web of wishes, knowledge, cultural expressions and manifestations in which every tread must be made strong and intertwine with all the others, every weaver well aware that he or she is

part of the whole. In each and every work at Criativos da Escola (all of them available on our website, [www.criativosdaescola.com.br](http://www.criativosdaescola.com.br)), this teamwork is always present.

This is what one sees, for instance, in *Cruzando os Sertões da Mata Branca: Educação e Sustentabilidade na Caatinga* (Crossing the Sertões of Mata Branca—Education and Sustainability in the Caatinga), a project developed in Iguatu (CE). Instigated by their geography teacher, students noticed that caatinga, the biome that characterizes their region and the only one which is exclusively Brazilian, was poorly depicted in school textbooks.

“A question came up in our group: Is it only our textbook that fails to properly teach what caatinga is or is this failure also present in other textbooks?” said Dailton Rolim, one of the students. They then conducted a survey among 189 students from seven schools, and also analyzed five geography textbooks used in schools across the city. The conclusion was as expected: the caatinga was indeed unknown.

Based on this finding, students mobilized themselves. First, they made an inventory of the plants indigenous to their region and started a garden. They also organized walks to raise awareness of the topic among other students. In addition, there was a joint effort to reforest the banks of the river that runs through the city. The second step was to pay a visit to the Secretarias do Meio Ambiente e de Educação (Environmental and Education Departments) to have an idea of what they were doing in order to promote the caatinga’s conservation.

“We saw that there was an enormous lack of public policies,” explained another student, Moisés de Souza. At that moment, students decided to propose a bill, which was approved after a hot debate in the city council—bill number 2.404, from April 28, 2016, that establishes the obligation to strengthen policies aimed at valuing and preserving the caatinga. Through that project, students changed not only the way geography is

taught in Iguatu, but also the town’s perception of its native biome. “We have a voice, and want other students and everyone else to hear it,” added Moisés.

Beginning with feeling, going through imagining and doing/making and then sharing—this last verb being the one that expands students’ horizons so they can see the world and its connections—, we can observe a process that, having students as protagonists and teachers as mediators, managed to teach, challenge, make people proud and inspire everyone. How could it have been any different?

Impelled by this inspiring place, by this instance of meaningful learning, of responsibility and autonomy, it is impossible to move on to a different activity and say “we do not want to do this anymore!”. These experiences leave indelible marks, memories that evoke positive feelings one hopes to live again. When you find out that you are capable of accomplishing a variety of things, it is just impossible to pretend otherwise. And what a bliss that is.

In a world filled with tension between collective doing and an alleged protection of individual interests that no longer meet the difficulties we face, we have, once again, the chance to learn while teaching, the opportunity of teaching and learning together.

We can live this collective protagonism everyday, as long as we step down from our little pedestal and begin to understand that what we say echoes in society, joining our voices together. It is this multitude of voices that boosts the process. Fortunately, it cannot be stopped; there is no turning back. It is our chance.

# PROTAGONISM IN EDUCATION: LEARNING TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR

by Luis Santiago Perera Cabrera

Santiago Perera is the principal of Guayamurí School (Margarita Island, Venezuela) - a Changemaker School.



“Protagonism” in education is a new term in Venezuela—the word “leadership” is more commonly used. Nevertheless, the discussion about which line should be adopted during the learning process, what path it should follow and how to promote the participation of its actors is a dilemma faced by those involved in education since ancient Greece.

Most learning theories highlight the importance of putting pupils in the center of the learning process, but in practice what we often see is a situation in which teachers supposedly know the pupils’ needs and what is the best way for them to acquire all the necessary knowledge. In reality, however, the school is less and less sure about what should be taught—society has changed, but the school has not.

The problem is not only what to teach, but also how to do it. The new generation of learners—the millennium children, as they are called—have different ways of learning. What could only be acquired through teachers and books can now be found faster, already updated, and more thoroughly, on the Internet, on YouTube or on any social media.

How can one motivate these new students to learn and, at the same time, make sure that what they are learning will be truly useful in this new reality in which they live? Students’ protagonism in education cannot be a cliché, with children limited to choosing the topics of their projects or having oral presentations in classes; it must include an open-minded discussion about what, how and when. We, teachers, should admit that most of what we teach is only useful during school years, and that a whole bunch of things we do not teach will be fundamental for the future of our pupils.

I work in a school in Margarita, a Venezuelan island, where, for the past twenty years, we have been trying to transform society through education, promoting the development of responsible students, socially engaged and aware that the changes they want to see in society are actually in their hands.

In order to do so, we try to make students actively take part in their learning process, and the microcompanies and cooperatives are instances of that. We assume that a high percentage of the jobs available nowadays will be unnecessary in a few years, and those that do not become extinct will suffer changes in their methods, processes and purposes. Therefore, what we teach are general skills and subjects that allow students, through a connection with a real job, to acquire practical skills they can use in the future.

When they enter secondary school—that is, when they are thirteen years old children voluntarily join a production unit that offers a real and necessary product or service, and that has competitors. For three years, students take different roles in every area related to the job; they create administrative routines and assign roles. In practice, it looks like a samba school where everyone is dancing to the same rhythm, and even though those who have more knowledge teach the rookies, everybody is dancing and having fun together.

Because we have many production units (fourteen in total), students can really take the opportunity to make decisions. The fact that the product or service offered is real, and generates profits, also transforms what takes place in the traditional school; thus, seven hours per week, students are in charge of their learning experience, being able to learn from each other as well as to offer a service to their community.

After eighteen years working with these microcompanies, we can state that it is an experience capable of offering a model of education for the millennium children, making them feel that they are protagonists and responsible for their learning.

# ORGANIZE, BE AWARE AND TRANSCEND: PROTAGONISM IN EDUCATION

SOME GUIDELINES OF THE LA SALLE EDUCATIONAL  
CENTER MALVINAS ARGENTINAS - CÓRDOBA, ARGENTINA

by Alejandro Bruni

Born in the province of Buenos Aires, he has 20 of experience in the field of popular education, working closely in the formation of youth leaderships for teaching in primary and high schools as well as universities. Within poor areas, Alejandro Bruni has lived in different parts of Argentina teaching languages and literature. Nowadays, he is the Changemaker School Colégio Héctor Valdivielso principal, in the province of Córdoba, Argentina.





## A local project

The Malvinas Argentinas municipality—which should not be confused with the infamous island that was object of the absurd war between Argentina and the United Kingdom in 1982—is situated 7.5 miles northeast of Córdoba, the capital of the homonymous province, the second most important, economically and demographically, in Argentina. The rural background of the population and the scarce resources and opportunities of securing a proper livelihood have generated, in Malvinas, a peripheral community in which many families live in poverty, barely able to meet their basic needs.

This is where the educational experience that I will now share with you takes place. Just as it happens in so many other peripheral communities across different major cities in Latin America, in Malvinas, the chance of survival for children and teenagers in Malvinas lies in the axiom that has been passed on through generations: “It’s every man for himself.”

In this place, protagonism is limited, structurally, to leftovers—everything that is discarded by the market economy, by politics, and also by food consumption. For women, all that is left is to grow up and live in a very sexist environment, following the social convention that expects them to look after someone else’s children (their little siblings) and then their own children, all of that in extremely vulnerable conditions.

Why do I make this introduction? Because an educational practice unable to address the needs and problems of its area is totally sterile.

This is the reason why, since the beginning of our journey, fifteen years ago, we wanted the wishes of each and every individual to find ways not only to be fulfilled but also to become visible—here and now. Taking into account the numerous demands, possibilities and dreams of the local population, we came up with the La Salle Educational Center, a series of interdependent projects aiming to produce political, pedagogical and pastoral proposals and

processes that can help humanize people and stimulate the different actors of the community, in an attempt to generate critical consciousness, empowerment, humanization and collective actions for the transformation of one’s reality.

We are driven by an ideal—that together we can create a “land free of injustices.” For us, this translates into the development and improvement of the community living conditions, so that people can have a more dignified life. These principles and intentions converge into three basic points that characterize, lead and unify our educational practice:

- A communitarian organization that does not deny individuality but redefines it based on the inclusion of everyone’s talents.
- Praxis awareness, so as to develop critical individuals who can think at the same time as they act and play a part in the world.
- And a sense of transcending and alterity able to bring forth the understanding that every action, every project, every activity lead us not only to a concrete and finite end but, more than that, to the development of new points of view that are inclusive, that maximize and generate bigger possibilities of, together, living a dignified life.

How can we put into action an educational proposal that can address all these points? The key is in the consolidation of the group of educators who will work together with their neighborhood, calling it into action and including it in the project, thus turning the community itself into the true protagonist of the educational project.

Inspired by Paulo Freire’s legacy, every year, between December and February, school teachers, alongside other actors of the educational center, walk around visiting different families so as to get to know them better, find out

how they are doing and talk about their realities and also about the learning process of children and young adults.

During these interactions, we write down some “sentences” that call our attention, relating to school, neighborhood, children, to the town itself, or to any of the things that are important to us or make us happy.

Thus, before the beginning of the new school term and before our meeting to discuss different educational proposals, we gather together to read all these sentences, which represent the voices of many families. We catalogue them, take them into account, think about their contents and analyze them thoroughly.

One of these sentences, all of them describing reality, will then stand out and become central to our work, helping us define everything that will be done and proposed throughout the year. The sentences also yield lines of work and priorities that will show us the path we want to follow as an educational center together with boys, girls, families, the neighborhood and other institutions in the same area.

This is how people’s voices, our main lines of work and that central sentence become a unity that we call “Thematic Complex”. We try to make sure that it dialogues with the national curriculum proposed by the Ministry of Education, which contains every subject and the contents that must be taught in schools. Thus, all contents and knowledge are re-signified, contextualized and associated with the realities, interests and concerns of children and young adults, as well as of the families of the community.

It is at this moment that school meets culture, families and the reality surrounding them; that is, meets life itself.

### **From territorial planning to an educational matrix**

In the Thematic Complex, one does not only plan the approach to school contents. The distribution of space and time, the exertion of authority, the dynamics of coexistence, the institutional rites, the interaction between families and neighbors—just to mention a few aspects—are reassessed and re-signified in the educators’ analysis of the Thematic Process. I will mention below some of the procedures and mediations this process brings forth:

- Election of student leaders and the holding of students’ assembly with pupils who are at least six years old.
- A participative building of the rules of coexistence with the help of students and family members.
- Customized educative paths based on the pupils’ needs.
- A breach with the traditional classroom structure brought about by the articulation of traditional subjects and artistic spaces, enabling the rearrangement of students in workshops of creative and popular learning.
- Creation of small popular libraries in the houses of the families of the community.
- Educative options to expand the cultural universe of community members.
- Playful and artistic interactions in public spaces with young adults and local residents.
- Sport, dance, radio, magazine and literacy workshops given by the teenagers themselves, so as to grant access to free cultural assets and change the general perception that young adults are dangerous individuals.
- Participation and integration in social and collective movements, by way of collective debates and decisions related to public policies.
- Creation of microcredit programs to help improve the most vulnerable houses.
- Participation in youth councils.

## Principles that guide and maintain us

Everything that has been said so far is maintained and encouraged by some beliefs and practices that are often, but not always, made explicit, but which are nevertheless part of an institutionalized culture.

I will now—to conclude—mention some of the practices that we believe are part of the foundation of our educational project and that may well be considered some of our guidelines.

- The will to grow and consciously become protagonists of the times we live in, being responsible for the changes that will result in situations and actions that dignify life. Because “in our school we learn to transform”, as states a passage from the Horizonte Pedagógico Pastoral de la Asociación Educacionista Argentina (Pastoral Pedagogical Horizon of the Argentinian Educational Association).
- We think of ourselves as an entity that prioritizes education—not only of the students themselves, but also of the different educators who are part of our effort. We educate ourselves together with others, and we do this by exchanging experiences both in the teaching spaces and outside them. This education recreates, re-signifies and gives shape to this project, which involves us as well as transcends us. And at the core of this education are the lives of girls, boys, young people, family members and inhabitants of the community. We educate ourselves together, and this enables us to think, analyze and share, as much as it invites us to grow as educators.
- We conceive ourselves as doing an educative work that has the crucial reality of its surrounding as its starting point. And this is a context of poverty, oppression, silence, absences and invisibility... But, at the same time, it is also a context of fights, demands, dreams, talents and joy. We educate because we believe in the potentialities of this im-

poverished society, and we create spaces to promote and follow its organizational and transformative processes. This is the reason why all its actions, voices and points of view are included in the planning, realization and assessment of the school and its activities.

- We face the latent challenge of becoming a stable community of groups and members that educate, teach and learn. We, those who are part of the educational center, want to establish ourselves as educators capable of mediating community and educative processes of learning and teaching. At the same time, we, who embrace the faith in Jesus Christ, recognize ourselves as part of a community that also participates in the work of God, in the construction of a Kingdom of Justice and Mercy in which not a single person is left out.
- We see ourselves as an educative work conducted and animated by a communal and collegial spirit. This educational project is, undoubtedly, a consciously joint effort. All those involved, with their responsibilities and in their positions, with their contributions and experiences, develop this project. Nowadays, that is our main role; we, who are part of this historical moment, here and now, but without forgetting our past and the best tradition of all those who preceded us—and, as odd as it may seem, always thinking of the ones who will, in the future, join us in what is yet to come.

I hope that this text and these considerations, which, in a way, are always incomplete, can be seen as an incentive for more educators to carry on cultivating an education that is really dynamic for the vital processes of so many children, teenagers and young adults who are waiting for us in a variety of places within our beloved Latin America.

# THE POWER WE HAVE

by Carolina Hikari Ivahashi

Student at the Changemaker School Federal Institute of Paraná—Instituto Federal do Paraná (IFPR), Jacarezinho campus.



We all have the power to become protagonists, but we do not always put that power into action. Being a protagonist means being able to defend what one believes is correct, expressing one's thoughts and opinions, having the liberty to discuss and debate; it means having a voice and not silencing because of fear, having an active voice and doing what one believes is right. Being a protagonist is, purely, acting.

In education, protagonism should be considered paramount; however, there are many places where it is still not seen as something relevant. Unfortunately, many people continue to see schools or any other learning spaces as tedious, as places filled only with desks, books, notebooks, pencils and pens. But the school environment is not just a place for intellectual learning, it is also a social space where people study the lives of other people, learn to live in society and, most importantly, where people learn to listen to and respect opinions not only similar to but also different from their own. Students cannot become protagonists if the school does not encourage them to take such initiative. By encouraging students to act and by supporting their actions, school changes society as it helps students become better citizens.

There is an important question that needs to be posed: To whom does the school belong, students or teachers? There are many answers to this question, and one of them is that the school belongs to its students, as they are the main, if not the only, reason why schools exist. School is where students see unexplored paths and realize they can change reality; one example is the student council, where they can make claims, organize talks and events and understand that they can make a difference from within the school. Nevertheless, not every school is like this; there are places where students long to do something different but are not allowed to, and that creates fear—fear of being wrong, of never being able to do or create anything different—, making them afraid of becoming protagonists.

From the moment students are given the opportunity to discuss a variety of

subjects with their teachers, members of staff and classmates, they become analytical and stop believing everything they are told without questioning all the possibilities. Whether they want to or not, students bring their external problems to school, and being able to discuss them in school, thus receiving help, makes them want to make a difference.

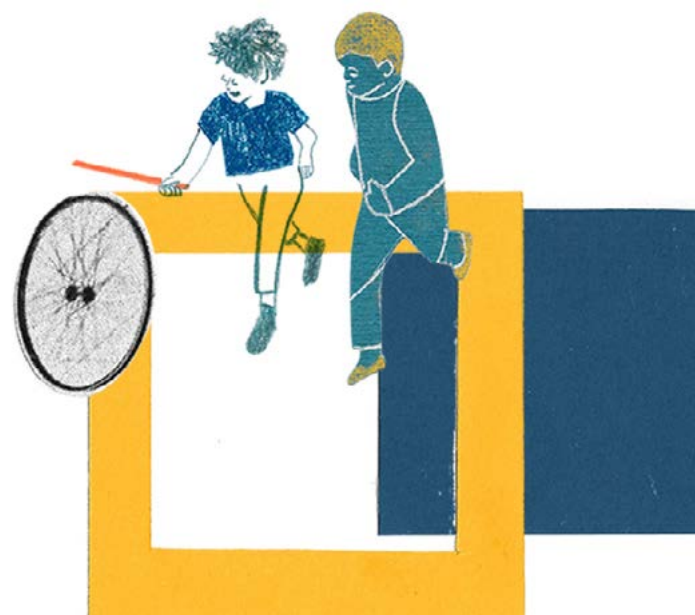
There are many teachers, principals or other staff members who are afraid of letting students become protagonists. For them, students are not capable of protagonism because they are used to being told what to do and nothing else; they follow an established schedule and do not try anything new. Little do these people know that we are all indeed capable of doing something new, once we are feeling distressed. It is important for educators to realize that they do not need to blindly follow course outlines. Educators can and should adapt themselves, hence bringing about the change that will make students understand that the school environment is a place where they are free to talk about any topic, where they can learn new things and become independent.

The Jacarezinho campus of the Federal Institute of Paraná—Instituto Federal do Paraná (IFPR)—was created by the Federal Government as part of a plan to establish high-quality government-run schools meant to provide students with the possibility of becoming protagonists. Through a great number of scholarships, it gives students the opportunity to get to know better the community and the society where they live. Students can conduct researches on important subjects, they report on the situation of a variety of places, helping other students which are having difficulty with certain school subjects, and they also create products that are not available in the market yet. Finally, they showcase their works in events, such as the “presentation week”, which traditionally takes place every year and allows students to present the results of their works to teachers, students and staff members.

The Institute also uses a new teaching method, based on curricular credits, that offers students the possibility to be more active. With this method, stu-

dents are in charge of their own schedule, being responsible for choosing the subjects they will study. This leads students to think carefully before reaching a decision, and raises questions such as: Are teenagers able to really become decision makers? Can they do it properly? Many of them are, indeed, afraid of making choices, of making a mistake and then regretting their decision. However, this is a phase they all must go through so that, later on, they may realize that having the opportunity to choose not only helps them to better analyze options in order to come up with a decision, but also enables them to become responsible and independent, being protagonists of their school life and striving for a better society.

Being a protagonist is just being yourself, not letting other people undermine you and put you down, because we are all capable of making changes.



# TEACHING WITH THE STUDENT AND TEACHING FOR THE STUDENT: WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

by Abdalaziz de Moura

Popular educator, coordinator of the agroecological course offered by the Changemaker School SERTA -Serviço de Tecnologia Alternativa-Alternative Technology Service, in Gloria do Goitá, Pernambuco



In the beginning of 2017, economy was in recession and the difficulties could be seen in a variety of institutions across the country. While looking at the figures from 2016, and planning 2017, we realized we would face some challenges in our agroecological course. Classes had been planned for 200 students, but in 2017 another 400 would be attending them. The institute was not ready for such a massive increase in the number of students enrolled in our course, neither were the teachers. Such a number should only be reached in four years time, but it took too long for the government to sign a partnership and there was a deadline to be met: July 2018.

After debating for an entire day, taking into account all alternatives and possibilities, it was hard to see any solution. Both our team and course are held in high esteem and we were afraid this increase would hurt the quality of the course we offer. It lasts 18 months, during which students spend one week at school and three with their families. The agreement with the state government contemplates teachers, lodgings, food and close monitoring of the time spent by students with their communities. How could we triple the number of students without hurting the quality of our work?

Furthermore, there was another issue: the available budget was for 400 students and we would be dealing with 600! It was not difficult to see that our institute was held in high esteem because it dealt with a relatively low number of students, and that it is impossible for schools with a big number of students in class to offer a proper teaching methodology. Would we be worsening our pedagogical methodology and image because it was not feasible to offer the same quality as before, when we were working with 200 students?

This question was based on common sense and science, on mathematics and psychology, as well as on simple economics. How could we feed and offer accommodation to 600 students in a place designed to receive 400? How could we maintain the quality of our school, the caring and attention devoted to students if the dormitories, the kitchen and the restaurant would

not be offering the same condition as before? This was also the case with our classrooms. No matter how much we discussed, did calculations, cut expenses, decided to relocate teachers, there seemed to be no solution. Until that moment, two weeks of immersion course were enough for 200 students, but now it would have to be four weeks in two different campuses distant 200 miles away from each other. Teachers would have to run to be on schedule, they would have to be in one place at the beginning of the week and travel to a different one later on that same week. It would be extremely tiring! Due to all that, our staff could not find a solution for this new challenge. A challenge that many schools and other institutions face and that make them slip into mediocrity. Would that happen to our school as well, or could we maybe expect some sort of miracle?

Should anyone be willing to justify low-quality services, this was the perfect situation—in terms of accommodation and classrooms, as well as of learning spaces and students' care. Numerous reasons would come up as excuses, should the quality of our work not meet the usual standards anymore. Considering logistics, didactics, management, finances, and pretty much everything else, it seemed clear that from 2017 onwards we would be a mediocre school—and we would have to accept this unpleasant reality!

### **Educating “for” and “with” makes the difference**

If we insisted on solving this problem as if it were an “operational” problem—that is, only demanding a better infrastructure, a bigger budget and more teaching and non-teaching staff—it would not be enough to guarantee a good quality service. That was not where the bigger problem was. All these elements are important and necessary, but they depend on other things. We could indeed have more of everything, but that would not have assured the quality of our teaching.

The most important point does not lie in any of those elements, but rather in the ideal of teaching we have in our school and that we want to put into



practice on a daily basis, in order to shape the minds of our students. We were looking at the problem as if we were thinking *for* the students and not *with* them! As if they were not subjects, authors, protagonists, but objects of our will—and as if we, as educators, had to think of everything, solve every problem to make sure the students received what was best for them. But what is the role of the students in a moment like this? Shouldn't they be thinking as well?

And then, just like the sun slowly rising above our heads, ideas started taking shape. What was an impossibility, a problem, a vulnerability and a threat to our ideals, became possibility, strength, opportunity. According to our teaching method, we had 200 protagonists, 200 engaged pupils who were thinking and acting energetically and taking part in daily school life—looking after the school, studying, having ideas, maturing. What a blessing! Instead of one week with all students at school, we would have four!

In the second half of four meeting, the problems were still the same; so, what had changed? The way we were looking at our teaching approach, our mentality, our philosophical ideal and the way we were analyzing the problem. When we change the way we look at something, things change. We resumed the meeting stating how we used to run the school and what great results we had achieved, and by doing so we realized that we were teaching *with* and not *for* students—and that we were at the risk of forgetting this essential trait of our school!

And right there, during the meeting, we began to contribute money to the expansion of the school dormitories; we started to do what we could, setting, as educators, the example, demonstrating what we were willing to do. We began to look at challenges and difficulties as opportunities to learn and to be creative, demanding new mental, ideological and philosophical ideals. And this change of posture was everything; it was the most important thing,

it was enough. Everything else, what was lacking, what we did not have, all that could be left aside.

It was amazing when we finally shared our concerns with our pupils! Normally, in January, during the holidays, we do not have many students taking part in internships. But in January 2017 the attendance was much higher than usual. This text is being written days before the beginning of the new term and the first groups of students have already arrived in both our campuses. Students are arriving and they can see that the school is undergoing some refurbishment, that not everything is in perfect order, and that we lack in infrastructure at the moment; nevertheless, they are realizing they will have to be protagonists throughout the year in this school: they are not only going to be part of, but rather they are going to take part themselves in this change! And I cannot wait to see it happening!

Gravatá, January 5, 2017.





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### Organization

Antonio Lovato

Carolina Prestes Yirula

Raquel Franzim

### Illustration

Catarina Bessell

### Graphic design

Luiza Esteves

### Revision

Todotipo Editorial

### English translation

Camilo Adorno

### Spanish translation

Sergio Molina

### Ashoka

Rua Carlos Comenale 263 - 3º andar,

Cerqueira César / São Paulo, SP

(11) 3085-9190 [brasil.ashoka.org](http://brasil.ashoka.org)

### Alana

Rua Fradique Coutinho 50 - 11º andar

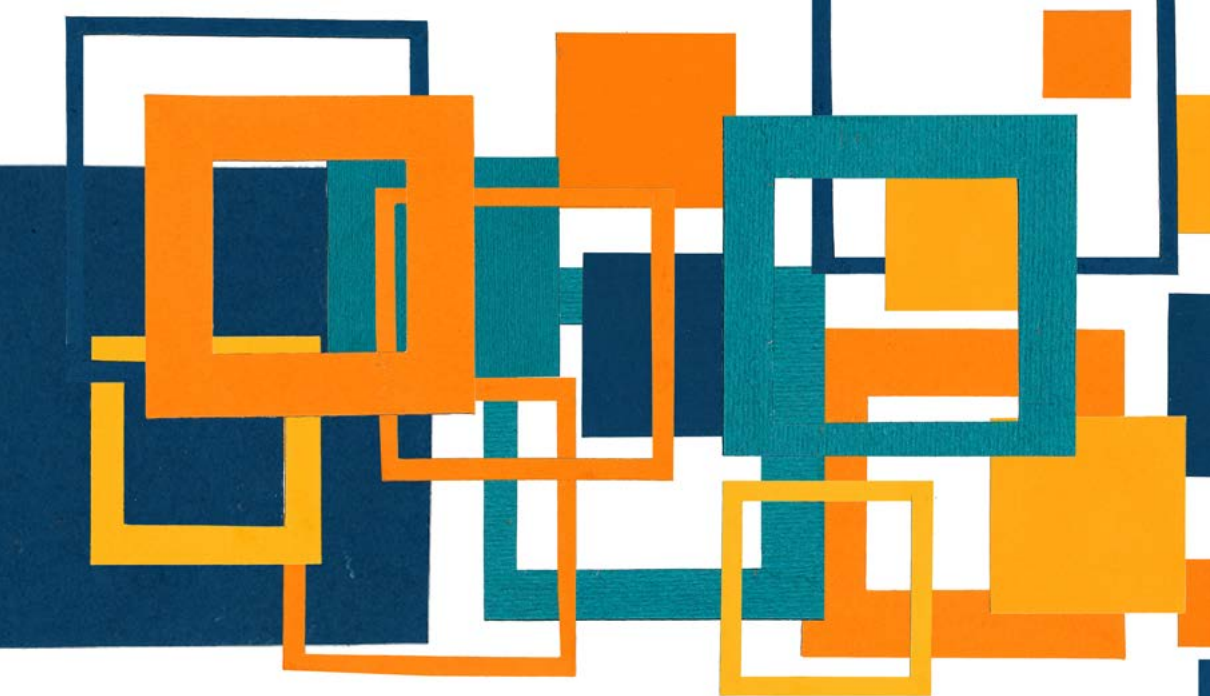
Pinheiros / São Paulo, SP

(11) 3472-1600

Rua General Dionísio 14,

Humaitá / Rio de Janeiro, RJ

(21) 3518-9808 [www.alana.org.br](http://www.alana.org.br)



## CHANGEMAKER SCHOOLS

Launched in September of 2015 in Brazil, this initiative seeks to identify, support and connect staff from schools that foster changemaker skills in their students, such as empathy, creativity, teamwork and protagonism. Eighteen educational institutions have become a part of the network in Brazil, and the mapping will continue over the next few years. The Changemaker Schools community has over 270 schools in 34 countries in all continents.

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