Literacy in and out of school in a Brazilian bairro: implications for policy

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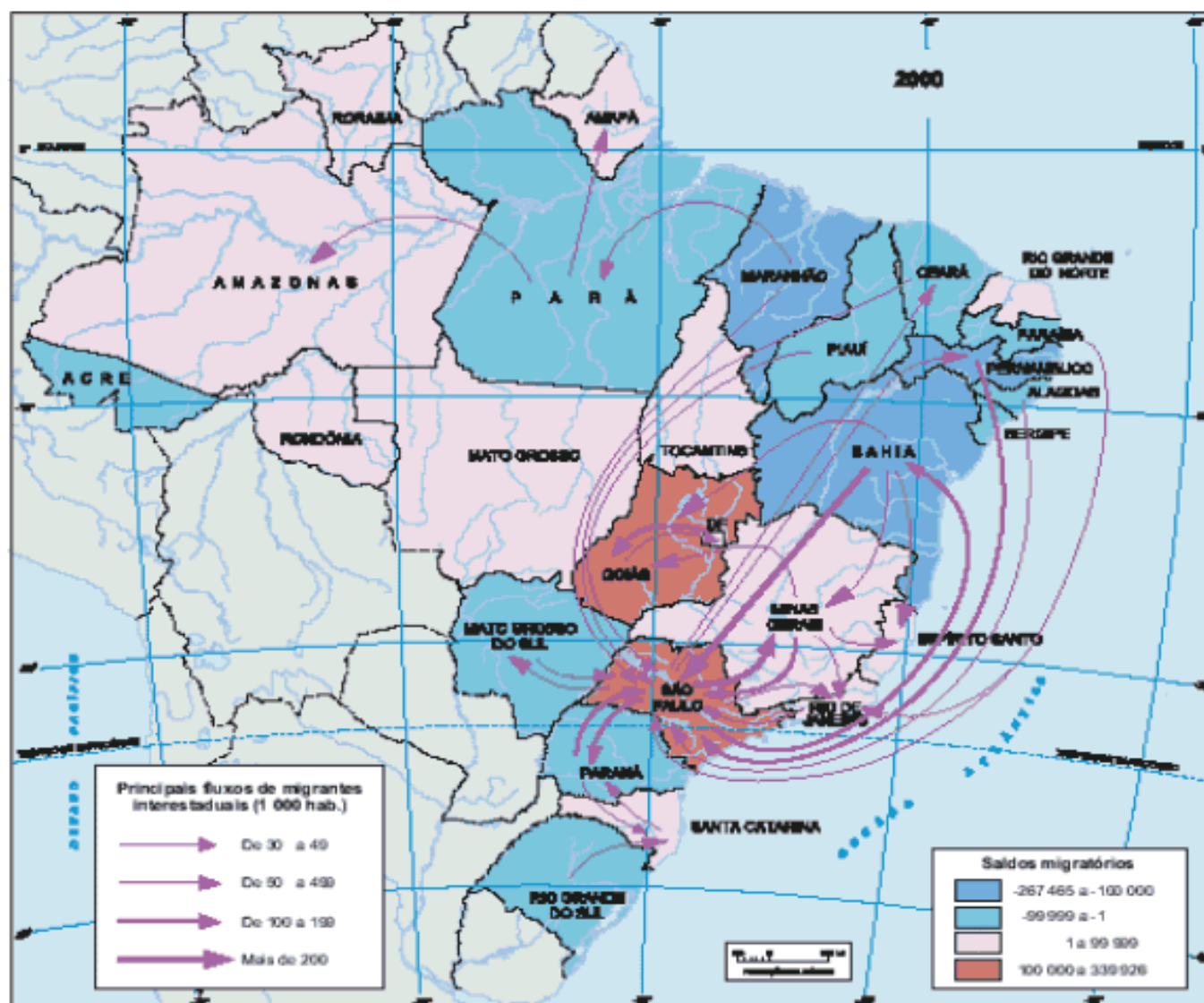Brian Street, King's College London

BALID

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Literacy and Education: ethnographic approaches

- **Ethnographic field work** in two periods - twenty years ago and currently

- **Question:** *'How do these people whom educators aim to reach, talk about themselves over time and across different institutional settings? How do they navigate across these settings?'*

- **Alternative** to dominant policy perspectives that stress schooled literacy and autonomous model cf PISA; PIAAC; GMR

- **Engagement** with and **role of literacies**; moving beyond narrow schooled conceptions of literacy as autonomous skill and instead taking account of the concept of literacy as social practices.

Context: Brazil

- Social mobility
- Role of schooling
- Commercial developments
- International policy, and local practices

Migração - 2000

2000

RORAIMA

AMAPÁ

AMAZONAS

PARÁ

MARANHÃO

CEARÁ

RIO GRANDE DO NORTE

PARAÍBA

ACRE

PIAUÍ

PERNAMBUCO

ALAGOAS

RONDÔNIA

MATO GROSSO

TOCANTINS

BAHIA

SERGIPE

DF

GOIÁS

MINAS GERAIS

MATO GROSSO DO SUL

ESPÍRITO SANTO

SÃO PAULO

RIO DE JANEIRO

PARANÁ

SANTA CATARINA

RIO GRANDE DO SUL

OCEANO PACÍFICO

OCEANO ATLÂNTICO

Trópico de Capricórnio

Principais fluxos de migrantes interestaduais (1 000 hab.)

- De 30 a 49
- De 50 a 99
- De 100 a 199
- Mais de 200

Saldos migratórios

- -267 465 a -100 000
- -99 999 a -1
- 1 a 99 999
- 100 000 a 339 926

Nota: Utiliza-se a informação do lugar de residência anterior há exatamente 5 anos antes da data de referência da pesquisa.

'What's going on locally?'

Accounts of data and context – where, what, when, who? eg literacy events; activities; meetings; materials; documents - cf 'thick description'

Ethnographic field work in two periods

Reflection on ethnographic field work in two periods - twenty years ago and currently.

- **1988/9** Maria Lucia researched in bairro as part of her Master's degree. She had worked there for two years previously, following a women's association day care programme. She interviewed Ivone, mother of Cristiano (who was 11 at the time) and also two of her children: Cristiane, a girl of 9 and Cassiano, a boy of 7.

- **2006/currently** In 2006, Priscilla, a Master's student who lives in the neighbourhood, took MLC's thesis there and showed it to Ivone's family, who read with interest the section where their names were cited. Cristiano's daughter noted particularly what her grandma, Ivone, said about her father and his dislike of schooling.

- Now, in a more recent visit, Cristiano himself referred to these accounts of his ideas about schooling from his perspective as someone now working in electronics. MLC also talked recently with Ida, who was a child of 12 during her earlier visit and learned especially about the relations between school and the Evangelical Church.

Trombetas 1988

Trombetas 1988

Trombetas School 1988

Trombetas school 1988

Trombetas school 1988

Palmares 2009

Palmares 2008 - By Priscila M. de Lana

Metropolitan Belo Horizonte: 4 million inhabitants

Trombetas 2009

Trombetas school area 2009

Evangelical church in Trombetas

From 1980 to 2009: writing became much more visible on the streets of Palmares: e.g. advertising, signs, pamphlets, newsstands.
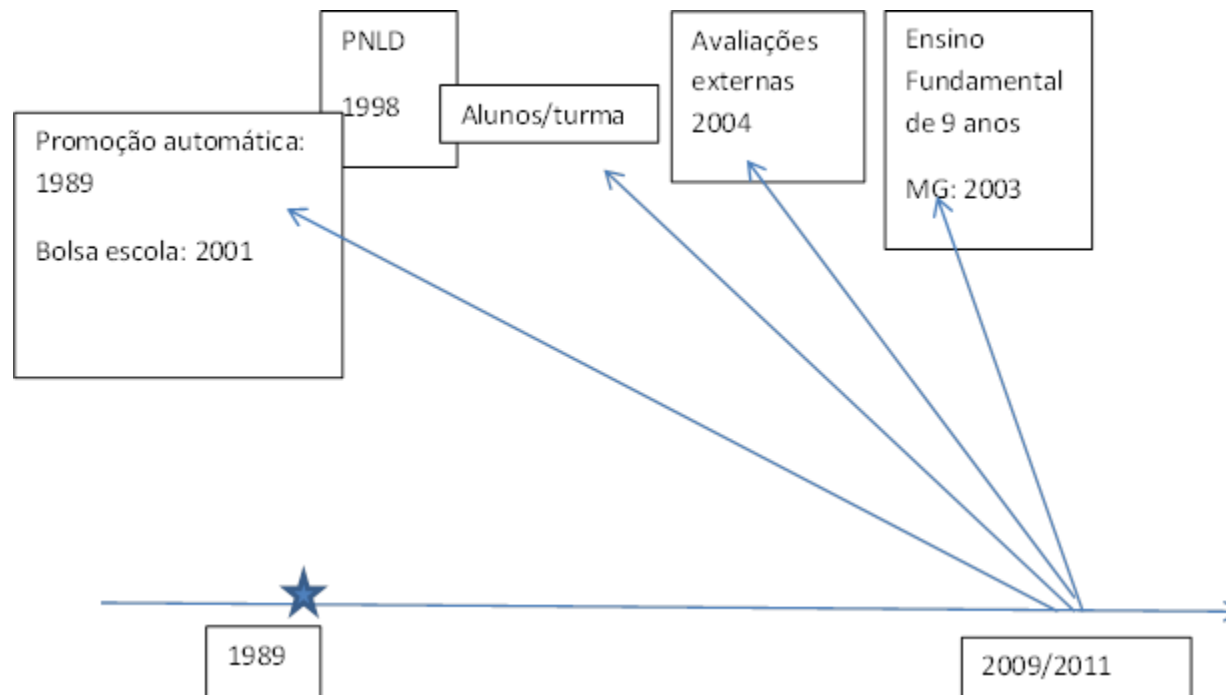
Changes in the Palmares landscape result from and reflect the economical change from a rural economy to industrial/urban economy.

In the 80s, the region where Palmares is located (Ibirité) received migrant families looking for work in the industrial area of Belo Horizonte.

Job market: work in factories (automobiles, clothes, cement, mechanic structures, minerals etc), construction, commercial stores, cleaning and maids.

1980s	1990s	Question to be further investigated
"Economic Miracle"; inflation; 1 minimal wage or less in each family	Brazilian economy begins to stabilize > bigger minimal wage More than one adult earning minimal wage per family;	In which ways have these economical changes impacted the access and engagement with reading and writing?
Adults & years of schooling : mostly 1 or 2 years of elementary school.	Adults & schooling: most have finished ES but not high school (women); 2 men finished college.	
One family per house	More than one family per house	
1988 => 60 000 inhabitants	2007 => 148.535 inhabitants	

Educational policies: changes overtime

Educational Policies			
	1987/8	2009	Implications for literacy
Textbook Program	No textbook evaluation by universities;	Evaluation by universities; universal free distribution: Math, Portuguese, N. Sciences, Geo & History	Changing materiality: > number and diversity of textbooks, literature and dictionaries; ≠ approach to language: from decodable texts to genres and social uses
Systemic Evaluation	Based on approval rate; 50% of students retained in 1st year of schooling. 'Adaption' of Foreign Tests to define time to begin early literacy *(Preparatory Period)*	*Automatic promotion* Systemic evaluation in various grade levels by Federal & State governments; *Provinha Brasil* (2nd year of schooling) Automatic promotion across years	Impact on curriculum, teaching oriented to prepare for tests.

Elementary school		
1987/88	2009	
Start: 7 years old; Extension: 8 years	Start: 6 years old Extension: 9 years Universality of state schooling for children at age of 6.	Re-defining boundaries of childhood; some parents question school conditions to receiving younger kids.
By law: 4 hours a day [at Palmares: 3 hours/turn]	By law: 4 hours a day [?]	How does school literacy relate to literacy outside school?

Cristiano's lived experience as a telling case

- **Cristiano**, a young man from the barrio who MLC interviewed recently and who family members referred to during her first visit in 1998

- cites different ways of seeing himself with reference to different institutions and can be seen to navigate across these institutions. For instance, he refers back to moments of his life including school, the factory, Church and his relationship to people in these settings.

- In the thesis his mother is cited as saying Cristiano didn't like school. Cristiano, now 35 years old, refers back to his experience at 9 years old, when Maria Lucia first did research there. In this narrative he represents his position and identity and the movement he made in his life. He signals meanings that school had for him, the agency he has for his own development. People such as him create space for themselves, their life, separate from school.

Cristiano	Translation	Analytical comments
eu achava assim	I used to think like that	
que	that	
numa boa	*not to worry*	*Identity* - Reflecting on
eu tinha	I had	his past action from his
eu	I	role as a father
eu até falo *muito* isso	I even talk *a lot* about that	
com minha filha	with my daughter	Assessing his past view
eu tinha uma visão	my view	of *school* as somehow
naquela época	at that time	limited
que eu achava	what I used to think	
eu tinha até uma certa ignorância	it was a kind of ignorance	
que não é bom, né	what is no good, isn't it?	Presenting reasons
eu pensava assim	I used to think	why he did not like
eeh	eeh	school: no relationship
como que *Tiradentes*	How is Tiradentes going to	with his interest in
vai me ajudar na eletrônica?	help me with electronics?	*electronics*

Cristiano	Translation	Analytical comments
nesse tempo eu matava aula pra ir lá pra oficina do meu pai escondido do meu pai porque se ele soubesse ele me dava um couro era oficina de arrumar televisão eu era fascinado com eletrônica aí, eu matava aula mesmo, saía escondido, ia lá pro Riacho, escondido do meu pai um dia ele me pegou e quase me bateu, mesmo 'você vai estudar!' (...)	At that time I used to skip classes to go to my father's workshop. I would hide it from him because if he found out he would hit me. It was a workshop for fixing TV. I was fascinated by electronics, so I kept skipping classes. I went to Riacho hidden from my father. One day he found that out and he almost hit me: "You are going to study!"	Creating an alternative way to learn electronics Remembering his father's attempt to reinforce the importance of school

MLC /Cristiano	Translation	
MLC: mas aí, eh ele ficava lá na oficina? C: não só o funcionário dele que ficava lá e me acobertava aí eu ficava lá ajudando ele a arrumar TV aí eu ganhei na época até muita ah, ele é burro, tomou bomba e não sei o que graças a Deus o diretor da escola que era o Lorivaldo, não sei se você lembra, eu dei aula pra ele porque eu tinha uma escolinha de informática o 'burro' deu aula pro MLC: diretor	*MLC: did your dad stay in the workshop?* C: no there was just his employee and he covered up for me I stayed there helping him to fix TVs. I got lots [of criticism] at that time "Ah, he is dumb," "he failed at school." [but] thank God, the school's principal Lorivaldo – I don't know if you remember him - I gave classes to him because I had a place to teach people how to use a computer. The 'dumb' gave classes to the MLC: principal.	Getting help from others for staying and learning in alternative space; *apprenticeship* *Identity* - Seeing self through the eyes of others: positioned as a failure; *school* set as the only criterion of success, people then missed what he was doing, his actual *learning* and achievement. Celebrating the rewards of alternative path: inverting position with those that had evaluated him negatively .

| Cristiano	Translation	Analytical comments
eu falei com ele: eu comecei a trabalhar cedo muitos que eram inteligentes na minha sala de aula foram funcionário meu os caras estavam trabalhando pra mim que era o burro (...)	I told him [the principal]: I started to work young; many of the bright kids in my class worked for me. The guys were working for me, the 'dumb' one.	Remembering and reaffirming his path to others Challenging the negative way he was positioned through positively creating work space for others.

The 'nothing can deter me' picture

Cristiano's electronic board
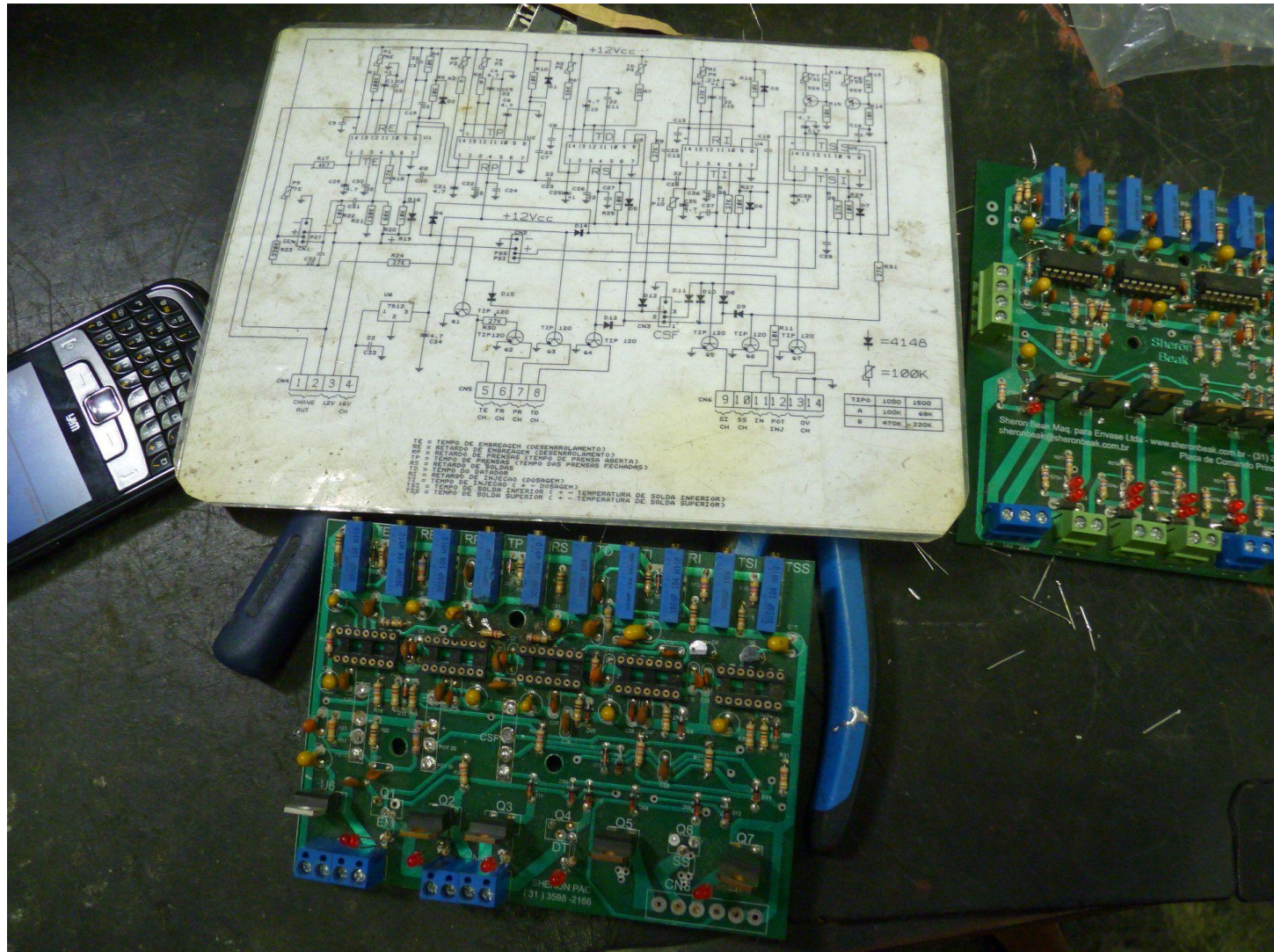
A wall on the workshop factory

Sheronpac Workshop office

Sheronpac worker from neighborhood

Engagement with and role of literacies

- Current accounts by Cristiano, recall the original sense of schooling as legitimising literacy capacities, which in this case meant deficit – he was seen as 'dumb', 'too shy to look in people in the eye'.

- But now he actually practices literacy in his occupation and social relations in quite complex ways, though he still may see his practices as inferior – the notion of 'Hidden Literacies' (cf Nabi et. al.) in which literacy is seen as associated with schooling whilst other literacy practices don't count.

- The schooling ideology, then, still lurks in their discourse. The complexity of the actual literacy practices can be seen, for instance, in Cristiano's map of circuit boards and use of computer programmes for projecting new machines.

Conclusions

- **Questions:**

  How do the people whom educators aim to reach, talk about themselves over time and across different institutional settings?

  How do they **navigate** across these settings?

- **Implications** of these questions and these data for Literacy and Development Policy

  e.g. follow people as they **navigate** across sites and **settings**: their actual uses of literacy

  e.g. implications for how we understand **schooling, education and learning** and their relation to people's actual lives.

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