

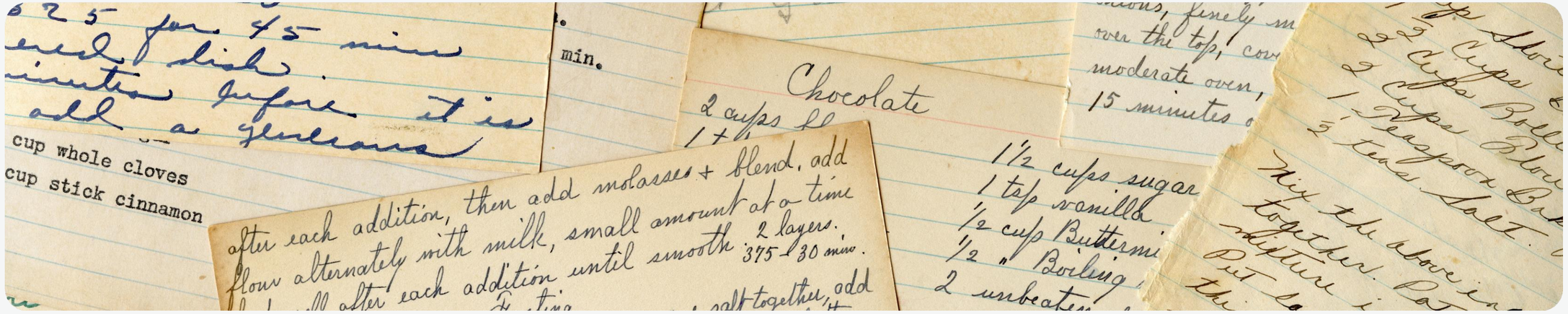
Narrative Writing

Noticing, Reflecting, and Learning from Experience

Initial Teacher Education Workshop

Presented by:
Prof. PhD Luciana Haddad Ferreira (Nana)

Date:
September 22, 2026





WHO I AM

My interest in narrative writing is connected to what teachers learn when they observe, write about, and share experiences from school life

Scan here to read one of my recent papers on narrative writing

Experience

- Brazilian professor and researcher at PUC-Campinas
- Currently at Simon Fraser University as a visiting scholar
- More than twenty years of teaching in elementary education

Fun facts about me

- I'm nearsighted, but I don't like wearing glasses.
- I never learned how to ride a bike.
- CrossFit is my favourite sport, but I also love running.

NARRATIVE WRITING

A short text in which someone selects a lived experience, reconstructs a scene, and explores what that experience reveals.

Begins in everyday school life

Creatively reconstructs a scene

Seeks to learn from experience





VITÓRIA

Teacher Elaine

October, 2019

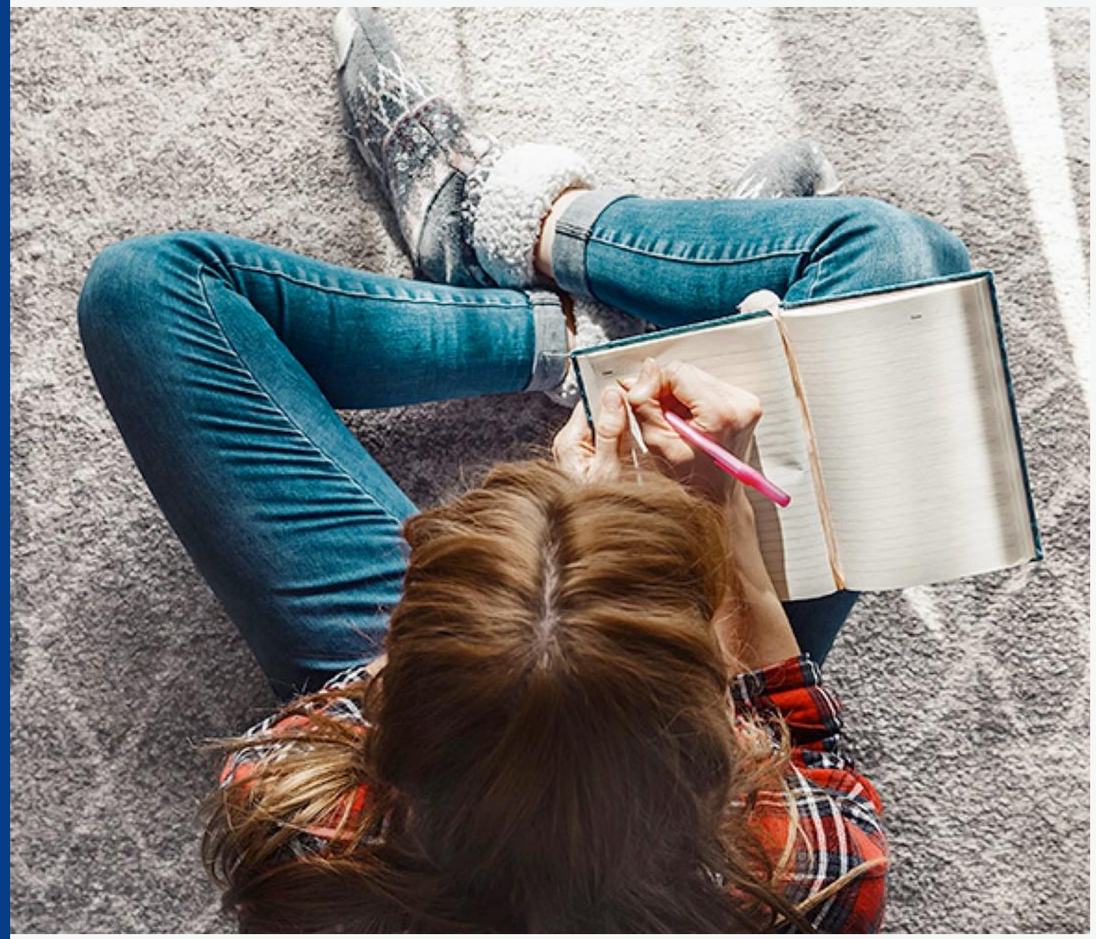
HOW DO WE KNOW THIS TEXT IS A NARRATIVE?

What in this text allows us to recognize it as a narrative?



A narrative begins with a lived experience, but it does not end with the event. It transforms what happened into an opportunity for understanding.

HOW DO WE KNOW THIS TEXT IS A NARRATIVE?





It begins with an everyday situation

A narrative does not require an extraordinary event. It often begins in an ordinary school situation. In Elaine's narrative, one student answers before another. The event seems routine, but the teacher's response turns it into an experience that calls for examination.

It makes a selection

A narrative does not tell an entire life story or everything that happened that day. It selects an episode, scene, or encounter. Elaine does not narrate the entire school year or even the entire lesson; she chooses a bounded event.

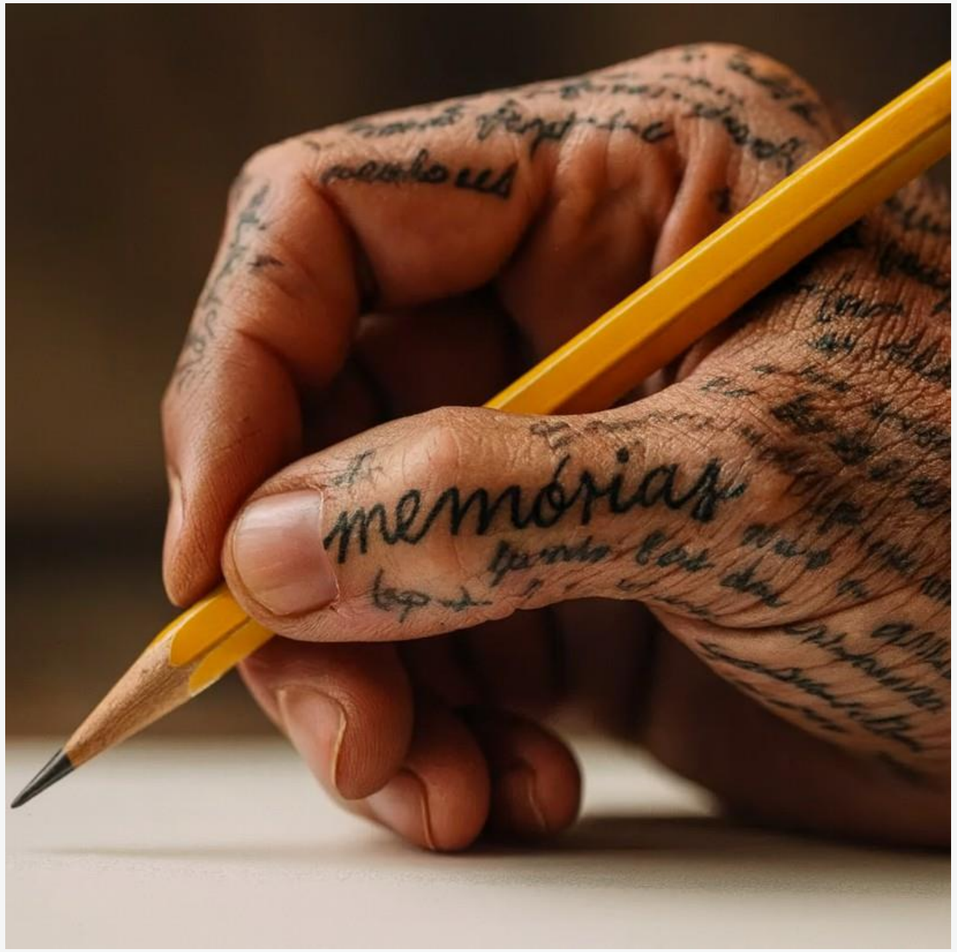
HOW DO WE KNOW THIS TEXT IS A NARRATIVE?

It provides sufficient context

The reader receives enough information about time, place, and cultural setting to understand the scene. We know that the class is correcting an activity together in early October and that the teacher has been emphasizing respect for each person’s turn to speak.

It is written in the first person

Using “I” is not enough. The writer must also place herself under examination. The narrative addresses both what happened and how the narrator was affected. Elaine examines her own actions: “I was furious," "I shouted," and "I did not know how to get out of the situation.”



HOW DO WE KNOW THIS TEXT IS A NARRATIVE?





It finds something provocative in what appears trivial.

Something contradictory, unexpected, unsettling, moving, or revealing emerges from an apparently simple event. Elaine wanted to teach respect for speaking turns, but she exposed a student through irony, creating a dynamic she could no longer control.

It selects concrete details

Gestures, words, silences, objects, sounds, and small actions make the experience present to the reader. Here, the teacher’s words, the children’s laughter, their imitations, and the return of her own tone of voice carry the scene.

HOW DO WE KNOW THIS TEXT IS A NARRATIVE?

IIt is close to literature

There is an aesthetic intention: we do not write only to record or prove something. We want to engage the reader and allow them to inhabit the experience for a moment. Elaine seems to be telling us an anecdote in person. This is not a classroom report; it contains a scene, tension, and an aesthetic organization.

It remains open

A strong narrative does not explain everything. It leaves room for the reader to think. Elaine's final questions turn the experience into a reflection without offering a moral or ready-made solution. We do not know how she resolved the situation, and that is not the most important point



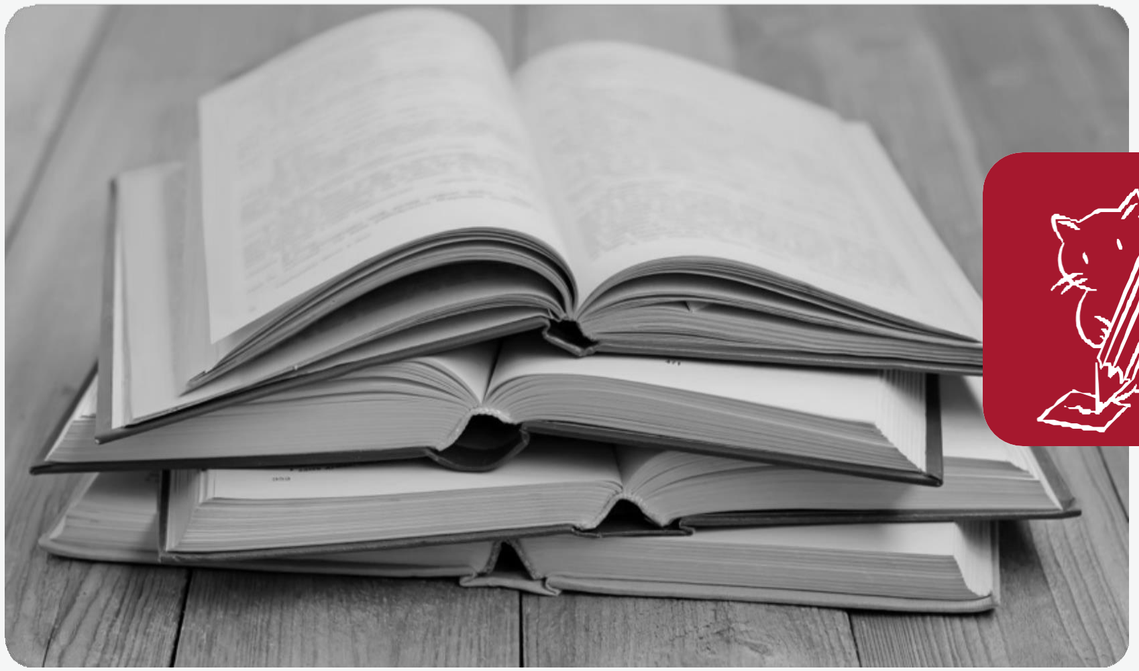


WHAT CAN WRITING A NARRATIVE TEACH US

What can we learn by writing about our own experience?

What might happen when we try to write about something we have lived through?

WHAT CAN WRITING A NARRATIVE TEACH US



Writing creates distance from our first emotions

When we live through an experience, we are inside it. Our first emotions may be intense: fear, anger, shame, joy, or frustration. Writing allows us to step back slightly. It does not erase emotion, but it allows us to observe, name, and question it. In Elaine's case, writing turns guilt into reflection.

Writing is a practice of memory

It enables us to revisit our trajectory and recognize the experiences, people, and events that have shaped us. Writing can therefore honor what we have lived and those from whom we have learned. For Elaine, the record prevents the event from disappearing amid the week's chaos.

WHAT CAN WRITING A NARRATIVE TEACH US

Writing gives material form to experience

Once written, an experience acquires a public and concrete existence. Writing can say: "This happened. This exists. We need to talk about it." Elaine confronts what she thought she knew and gives form to her not-knowing: these forms of authority and irony exist in the classroom, and she recognizes that she reproduced them.



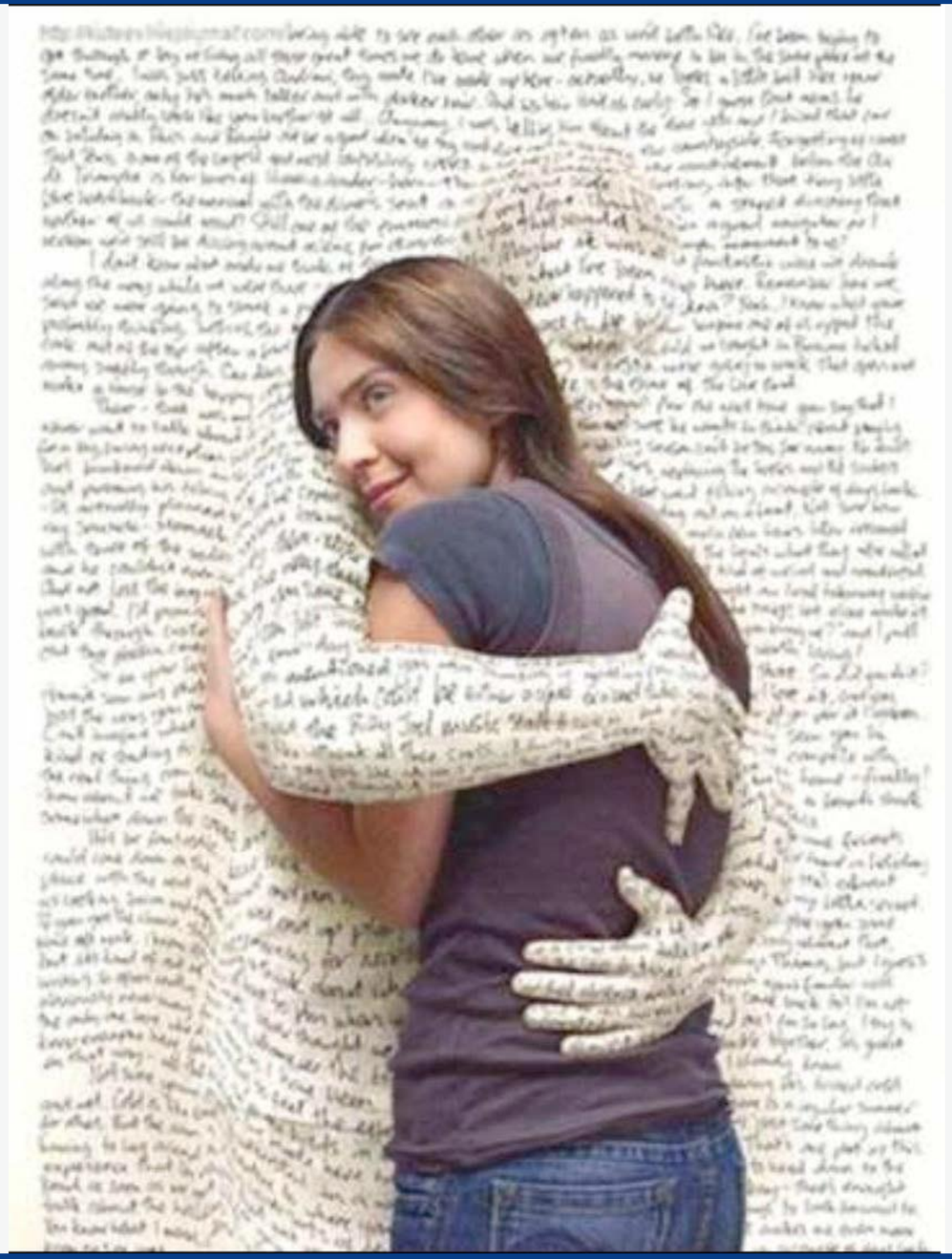
Writing tests our principles

We may say that we believe in dialogue, inclusion, autonomy, or social justice. By narrating a concrete event, we can examine how we think, feel, decide, and act, and whether our actions are coherent with the principles we defend. Elaine’s narrative reveals the distance between her commitment to listening and respect and what she actually did

WHAT CAN SHARING AND LISTENING TEACH US

What happens when a narrative is shared and listened to by others?

What happens when Elaine shares this narrative, and we listen to it?



WHAT CAN SHARING AND LISTENING TEACH US



We learn to listen without immediate judgment

The first demand of narrative sharing is to receive another person's experience without immediately assessing it, correcting it, or telling the person what they should have done. Listening to a narrative means temporarily welcoming the world presented by the other. This does not suspend ethical evaluation; it creates the conditions for examining experience in its complexity

We recognize that we are not alone

A narrative is singular because it belongs to someone. Yet we may recognize feelings, conflicts, and doubts that are also part of our own experience

WHAT CAN SHARING AND LISTENING TEACH US

We recognize the collective dimension

The story belongs to one person, but it is not only about that person. School experiences are also produced through relationships, cultures, institutions, policies, and social conditions. What appears to be an individual problem may reveal a collective issue. Elaine’s story is her own, but authority, control, exposure, and listening are collective, cultural, and institutional questions.

We feel authorized to write

When someone shares an experience honestly, others may feel the desire to write and share as well. Narrative reminds us that we, too, have something to say. We should not silence ourselves.



WHAT DID THIS NARRATIVE INVITE US TO THINK ABOUT?

What can the narrative itself teach us



Every narrative carries knowledge

Something can be learned from an experience, but that learning need not appear as an explicit lesson. A narrative does not have to end with "I learned that..." Its images, choices, and tensions can do that work.



A narrative is an invitation, not a closed explanation

If we tell readers exactly what they should conclude, we reduce the narrative’s power. A strong narrative creates conditions for reflection while preserving openness.



Every day of life is full of provocations

School life consists of small scenes: a question, a look, a refusal, a silence, a joke, an unexpected answer. If we are inattentive, we may move through the classroom without noticing what these small details can teach us.



Education is an ethical and aesthetic practice

Teaching requires knowledge and intentionality, but also commitment, sensitivity, and attention. There is no good teaching without a willingness to be affected by encounters with students, colleagues, and the reality of the school.

THE RESEARCH IN CANADA

This workshop study is part of a broader project on initial teacher education in Brazil and Canada

The objective is to understand how narrative practices develop in different teacher education contexts and under what conditions they contribute to reflection, professional knowledge, and the ways future teachers position themselves in relation to the challenges of teaching.

The activities are for everyone. Consent concerns only whether your contributions may be considered as research data

Participating in the research means authorizing the researcher to access and use the narratives you write during Educ 400 as research data.



THE CONSENT FORM

Everyone may participate in the workshops and write, revise, read, and share their texts, whether or not they agree to participate in the research. Your decision will not affect your assessment, academic standing, or relationship with SFU.

Scan and acess the Consent Form

PREPARING TO NOTICE DURING THE FIRST SCHOOL VISIT

Narratives often begin with very small events



The invitation is simpler: be present. Observe. Listen. Allow something to awaken curiosity, discomfort, surprise, or wonder.

FOUR DISPOSITIONS FOR THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE



Observe with curiosity

Observe with humility. Do not assume that we already know what a situation means. A first impression may matter, but it does not need to become a conclusion.



Question what appears obvious

Question what appears obvious. Ask: Why is this here? Why was this said? Why did this situation capture my attention? Why did I feel what I felt?



Notice signs of broader questions

Notice signs of broader questions. A small scene may reveal something about belonging, authority, care, inequality, learning, or participation.



Imagine future readers

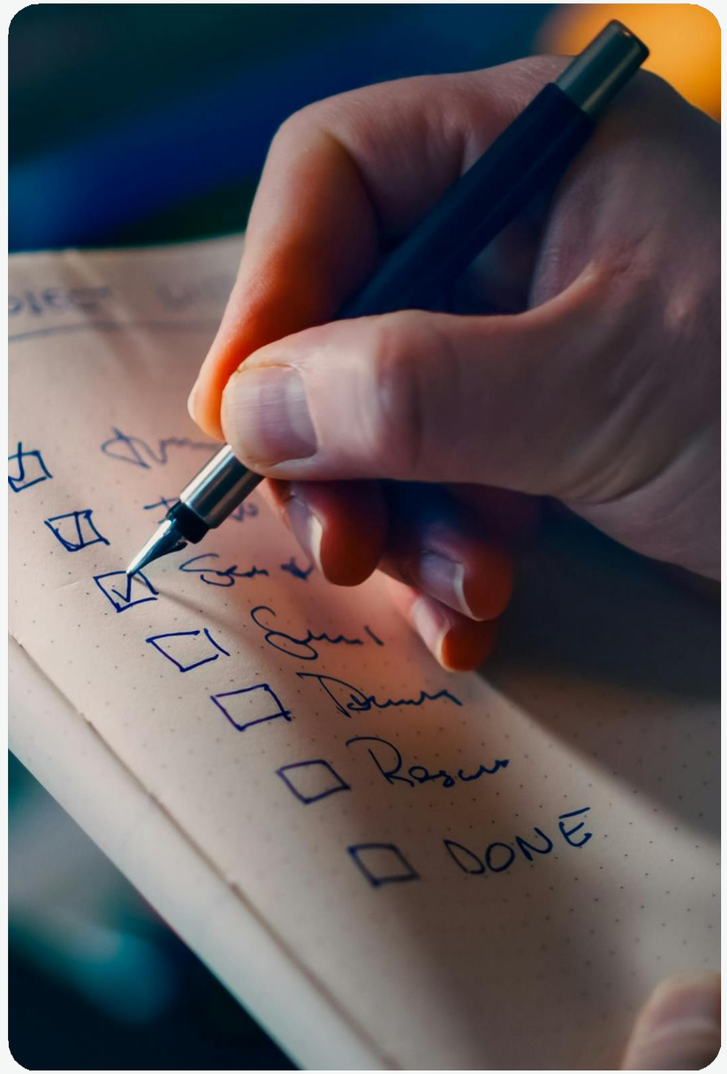
Imagine future readers. Ask what another person preparing to become a teacher would need to know to understand the scene, and what might invite them to reflect.

PREPARING TO NOTICE DURING THE FIRST SCHOOL VISIT

After the visit, or during a break, if that is possible and appropriate, write down one scene that stayed with you; a sentence you heard; a gesture, object, or detail; something you felt; and a question that emerged.

Do not worry about explaining or interpreting yet. The purpose is to keep important details from disappearing. You do not need to write the narrative tomorrow. It is important, however, to record the experience while some details are still present. You will write the first full narrative later.

Record the experience as soon as possible. Your first record may be a list, a few sentences, isolated words, or a voice memo to yourself.





GUIDANCE FOR FUTURE WRITING

Context. Information about time, place, and cultural setting.

Choose one scene, encounter, or episode.

Something provocative in what appears trivial.

Include yourself in the experience.

Preserve concrete details.

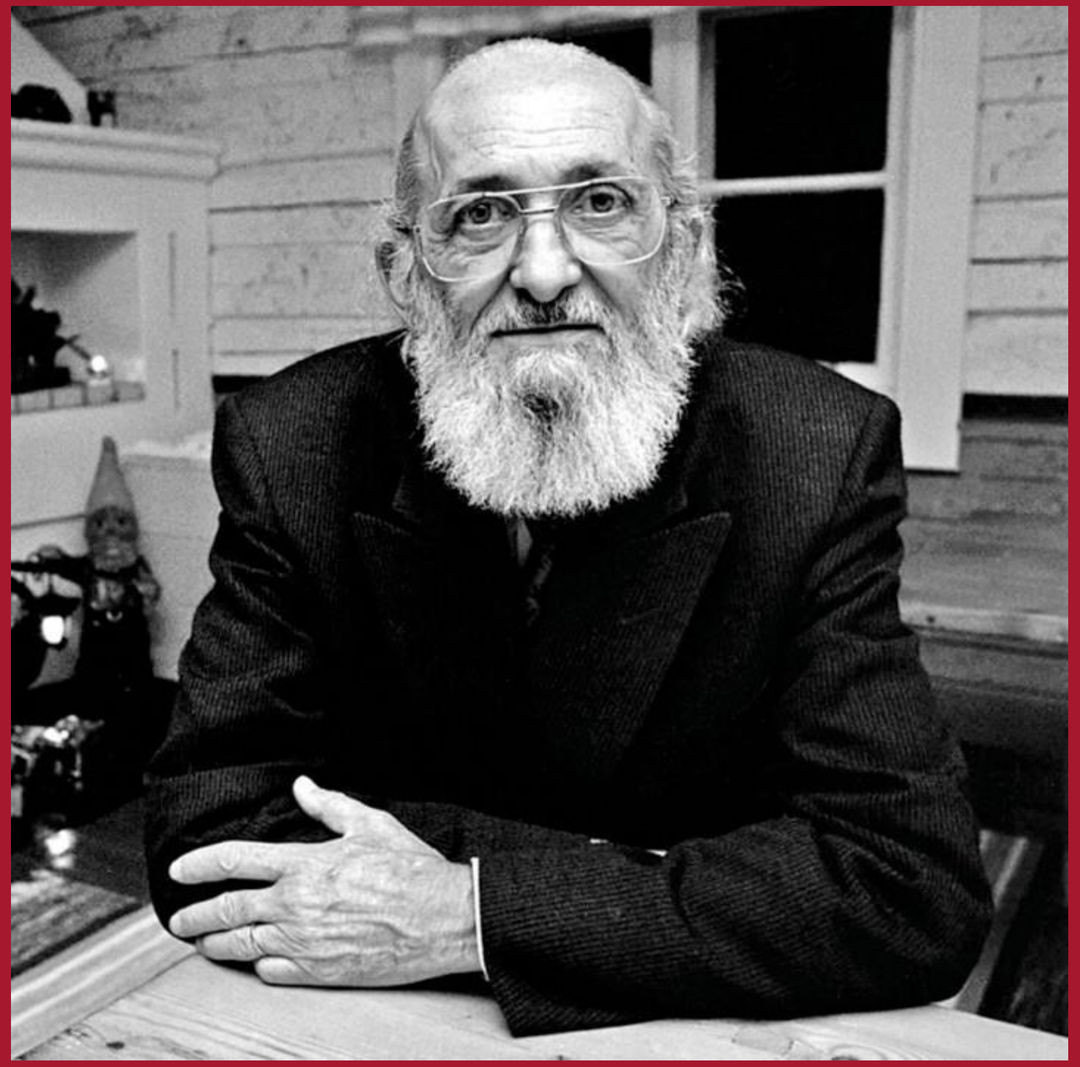
Keep the questions.

Protect the people involved.

Aesthetic intention.

Knowledge emerges only through **invention and re-invention,** through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

– *Paulo Freire*



Paulo Freire (2014). “Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition”, p.52, Bloomsbury Publishing USA



Thank you!

Initial Teacher Education Workshop

Presented by:
Prof. PhD Luciana Haddad Ferreira (Nana)

E-mail:
haddad.nana@gmail.com