

Between methodologies and practices: an outreach experiment at the intersection of Architecture and Anthropology

Entre metodologias e fazeres: uma experiência extensionista entre Arquitetura e Antropologia

Entre metodologías y prácticas: una experiencia de extensión entre Antropología y Arquitectura

Priscila Erthal Risi 

Centro Universitário UDF; Curso de Arquitetura e Urbanismo.
Brasília (DF), Brazil.
priscila.risi@udf.edu.br

* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

This article aims to present and reflect on a combination of teaching methodologies, particularly the relationship between architecture and anthropology, as applied in an outreach experiment. Thus, it focuses on a specific segment of a project called *Casas Coloridas* [Colorful Houses], developed with students from the architecture and urbanism undergraduate program at the Centro Universitário UDF, as part of a doctoral research project at the Universidade de Brasília, concluded in 2021. Drawing on Jorge Larrosa Bondía's concept of *learning through experience*, the article details the development of this outreach project, from the initial meetings and theoretical approaches, through the empirical routines established by the group during meetings, to a description of key activities involved in the development of the project. Based on this experience, it reflects on fieldwork as a foundational practice for mediating between theory and the critical teaching of architecture, seeking pedagogical insights in the field, underscored by Carlos Rodrigues Brandão's concept of *contamination*. The study thus demonstrates that such an approach serves as a valuable teaching tool with significant implications for teaching practice, encouraging students to broaden their observations and develop nuanced understandings of social and spatial relationships.

Keywords: Experience; Architecture; Anthropology; Fieldwork.

Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar e refletir sobre a combinação de metodologias de ensino, em especial a relação entre Arquitetura e Antropologia, aplicada a uma experiência extensionista. Dessa forma, faz um pequeno recorte do projeto extensionista experimental denominado “Casas Coloridas”, desenvolvido com alunos do curso de Arquitetura e Urbanismo do Centro Universitário UDF, durante uma pesquisa de doutorado na Universidade de Brasília, defendida em 2021. Embasada na ideia de *educação pela experiência* de Jorge Larrosa Bondía, o artigo apresenta a montagem do projeto extensionista, desde as primeiras reuniões e investidas teóricas, passando desde a rotina de atividades empíricas estabelecida pelo grupo durante reuniões até a descrição de atividades-chave do desenvolvimento do trabalho. A partir dessa experiência, o artigo traz reflexões sobre o exercício do trabalho de campo como fundamento para a modulação entre teoria e ensino crítico da arquitetura e busca, na experiência de campo, reflexões de natureza pedagógica, sublinhadas pelo conceito de *contaminação* de Carlos Rodrigues Brandão. Demonstra, com isso, ser um instrumento didático com importantes impactos na prática pedagógica, estimulando os estudantes a aprofundarem suas observações e formas de enxergar as relações sociais e espaciais.

Palavras-Chave: Experiência; Arquitetura; Antropologia; Trabalho de campo.

Resumen

Este artículo busca presentar y reflexionar sobre la combinación de metodologías de enseñanza, en particular la relación entre arquitectura y antropología, aplicada a una experiencia de extensión. Para ello, se presenta un breve extracto del proyecto de extensión experimental “Casas Coloridas”, desarrollado con estudiantes del programa de Arquitectura y Urbanismo del Centro Universitário UDF durante un proyecto de investigación doctoral en la Universidad de Brasília, defendido en 2021. Basado en la idea de *educación a través de la experiencia* de Jorge Larrosa Bondía, el artículo presenta el desarrollo del proyecto de extensión, desde las reuniones iniciales y los enfoques teóricos, pasando por la rutina de actividades empíricas establecidas por el grupo de extensión durante las reuniones, hasta la descripción de las actividades clave en el desarrollo del proyecto. A partir de esta experiencia, se reflexiona sobre la práctica del trabajo de campo como fundamento para la modulación de la teoría y la enseñanza crítica de la arquitectura, y se buscan reflexiones pedagógicas en la experiencia de campo, subrayadas por el concepto de *contaminación* de Carlos Rodrigues Brandão. Se revela así como una herramienta didáctica con importantes impactos en la práctica pedagógica, incentivando a los estudiantes a profundizar en sus observaciones y formas de ver las relaciones sociales y espaciales.

Palabras clave: Experiencia; Arquitectura; Antropología; Trabajo de campo.

1 The notion of methodological contamination and the quest for new pathways in fieldwork

In the 1970s, Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos¹, a professor at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), proposed viewing the architect less as an intervener and more as a translator of spatial practices. His research examined spatial practices through methods that were largely absent from the curricula of architecture and urbanism programs, and distinguished his work by exploring alternative possibilities and the tensions among technical, political, and empirical dimensions. Thus, in this engagement with the disciplinary grammar of urbanism – especially modern urbanism of the early twentieth century, marked by a rational, universalist epistemology – Nelson dos Santos coined the term *antropoteto* [anthropotect] (Santos, 1980, p. 44): a hybrid figure, part anthropologist, part architect, who integrates ethical and aesthetic dimensions in the approach to urban space. For Santos, an *antropoteto* is an architect who does not merely conceive authored spatial interventions, but also describes and interprets the relationships that both shape and are shaped by the spaces under investigation, and which are objects of intervention, thereby enabling a different mode of dialogue between the architect and the nature of the intervention.

This article aims to present and reflect upon a combination of teaching methodologies – particularly the intersection between architecture and anthropology – applied in an outreach project experiment entitled *Casas Coloridas*² [Colorful Houses], developed in 2019 with eight architecture and urbanism students from the Centro Universitário UDF. The outreach project formed part of a doctoral research project at the Universidade de Brasília, concluded in 2021, whose primary objective was to explore methodological experimentation in fieldwork, and to reexamine the debates on methods and the challenges of teaching and learning in the fields of architecture and urbanism. By detailing the development of the project – from the initial meetings and theoretical groundwork, through the empirical routines established by the project group, to a description of key fieldwork activities – the article seeks to contribute to pedagogical reflection in which being in the field is not merely instrumental for “gathering data,” but constitutes a space where subjects are transformed – as well as their relationships with space, with

¹ Carlos Nelson Ferreira dos Santos (1942–1989) was a faculty member at the School of Architecture and Urbanism at UFF and completed his postgraduate studies in Social Anthropology at the National Museum under the supervision of Gilberto Velho. He is recognized as an academic who developed pioneering urban regeneration projects based on methodologically horizontal work carried out in collaboration with local communities. He coordinated the research project *Apropriação de espaços de uso coletivo em um centro de bairro na cidade do Rio de Janeiro* [Appropriation of collective-use spaces in a neighborhood center in the city of Rio de Janeiro], conducted together with Arno Vogel and Marco Antônio da Silva Mello. This project assumed “a different character by privileging ethnographic methods through an invitation extended to anthropologists to participate in a team originally composed of – and conceived to be carried out solely by – architects” (Vogel; Mello, 2017, p. 13).

² The outreach project took place throughout 2019 at the early childhood learning center of the *Vivendo e Aprendendo* [Living and Learning] Association, in Brasília. Initially, the outreach activities were intended to present architectural and urban design proposals for adapting the school space, in response to a concrete demand from the association. On the other hand, the development of the work plan was deliberately structured around fieldwork methodologies, as a form of methodological experimentation aimed at underscoring issues such as stance, observational skills, and the production of relevant data to inform future spatial interventions. However, the project was abruptly interrupted in 2020 due to the school’s closure during the pandemic.

collectives, and with the researcher's own perspective.

The central narrative focuses on the methodological aspects involved in organizing the outreach project, establishing work routines, and experimenting with hypotheses regarding fieldwork practices, all viewed through a pedagogical lens. At the outset, what we call "word-devices" will be introduced, which, from the very drafting of the schedule, helped organize the project stages and sought to name the nature of the planned activities, accompanying the initial activity planning. These words represent the conceptual framing and modulations inspired by participant observation techniques drawn from anthropology: [*inside*], [*outside*], [*spiral*], [*stitches*].

The approaches to contemplating spatial interventions through engagement with other disciplinary fields reflect a dual aim: i) to critically examine the construction of a research field in architecture and urbanism grounded in a strictly technocratic, scientific perspective, which emphasizes the mastery of digital tools for data collection and research; and ii) to draw on the empirical resources of pedagogical experience, which circumstantially applies certain techniques and methods from anthropology, interwoven with curricular objectives.

2 Pathways toward fieldwork: structuring the outreach project

The outreach project emerged from a demand for architectural and urban adjustments within a school space, although not directly *on behalf of* the school itself. This demand required both the expansion of its program of needs, through the creation of new functional environments, and land regularization. Selected in the 2019 UDF research call, the *Casas Coloridas* project sought from the outset to bring the school's administrative needs closer to an opportunity to experiment with field research methodologies, ensuring that these administrative requirements would not override the pedagogical intentions of the outreach project. However, in 2020, with the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, lockdown measures, and the closure of schools, the project was forced to interrupt its ongoing field research and instead shifted its focus to the lived experience.

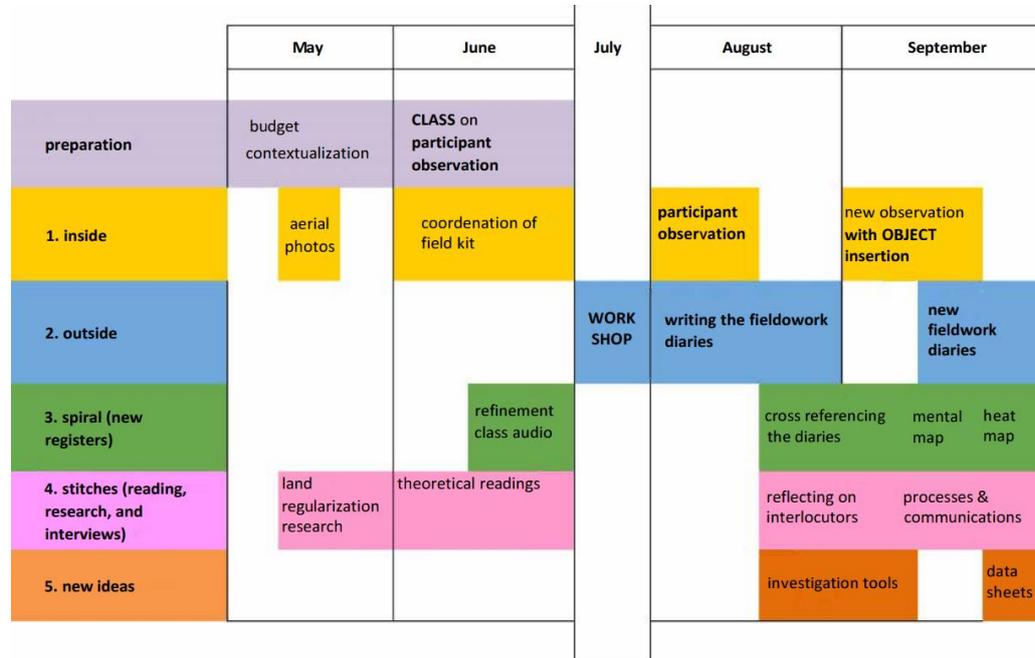
As previously mentioned, the *Casas Coloridas* project was part of a doctoral research project at the Universidade de Brasília, concluded in 2021³. This article situates that experience within a broader methodological experimentation in fieldwork, in which outreach practice assumed both formative and investigative roles. Thus, the section presented herein does not merely report an isolated action, but rather frames it as an exercise in critical experimentation that shaped the course of the academic research and later generated pedagogical insights for the teaching environment.

To present the methodological foundations for organizing the outreach project, we drew on a term borrowed from anthropology – *contamination* (Brandão, 2007) – understood as a mixture of forms of knowledge that produces transformation, generating new elements and new "viral loads": disciplinary, representational, affective, and perceptual. This term is central to a research approach that, from the outset, does not rely on the purity of a single method, but rather on the empiricism of techniques in which the need for

³ RISI, P. E. Contaminando o projeto de arquitetura e urbanismo: sobre metodologias, teorias e fazeres [Contaminating Architectural and Urban Design: On Methodologies, Theories, and Practices]. 2020. 153 f., il. Thesis (Doctorate in Architecture and Urbanism) – Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, 2021. Available at: <http://repositorio.unb.br/handle/10482/41012> (Accessed 30 September 2025).

experimentation and adjustment prevails and is continually recalibrated throughout the course of the project. Contamination is not a simple exercise; on the contrary, it is a collaborative experience among theories, methods, and subjects, becoming a mixture of discomfort, fatigue, curiosity, and care. The construction of the work schedule, initiated in June 2019, and the use of the device-words reflect this contamination (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Work schedule of activities of the *Casas Coloridas* project.



Source: Own elaboration, 2021.

The work schedule presents a collection of activities and reflects the underlying intention that these activities operate concomitantly and continuously throughout the research program. For example, the *[inside]* and *[stitches]* activities run consistently over the months of work, while a given activity may take prominence without necessarily displacing the others, giving rise instead to new modulations and opportunities for reflection. The adoption of this artisanal approach is grounded in various authors from the field of anthropology, with a dense theoretical fabric concerning the importance of fieldwork and participant observation – i.e., positioning oneself attentively, actively, and at the service of the research – confirming the necessity of prolonged contact for developing a more open posture toward research, for making adjustments, and for relational depth (Ingold, 2016; Geertz, 2015). Moreover, this artisanal approach also involves reviewing, repositioning, and returning. As far as possible, this was reflected in the work schedule, which demonstrates the pedagogical intentions and the nature of the activities planned for 2019.

To practice participant observation, then, is to join in correspondence with those with whom we learn or among whom we study, in a movement that goes forward rather than back in time. Herein lies the educational purpose, dynamic, and potential of anthropology. [...] (Ingold, 2016, p. 409).⁴

It is important to highlight that, prior to the commencement of activities, an agreement was established with the school's pedagogical and administration teams that the outreach

⁴ N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of INGOLD T. That's enough about ethnography! *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4 (1), 2014, p390.

project would operate on-site at the institution, but with not interfere in the classroom dynamics or engage directly with the children, thereby adopting a parallel, observational, and interpretive stance. In contrast, a broader openness to dialogue and interaction was proposed with the staff and faculty, which the students took advantage of more spontaneously. The general framework of the *Casas Coloridas* project was presented to the pedagogical coordinators and school administration, outlining the collaborative aims in relation to normative aspects of intervention within the school space, as well as the outreach project's focus on mutual education and self-education for architecture students through observation, description, and dialogue. The principles of presence, persistence, and participant observation were emphasized and positively received.

2.1 Possible pathways

Aiming to present the methodology of the outreach work in the format of a brief article, and with the intention of inspiring new practices, this text does not cover all project activities, but rather highlights those that, due to their prominence, represented significant pedagogical modulations. These are [*inside*], [*outside*], [*spiral*], and [*stitches*] (Table 1).

Table 1: Word-devices for the outreach project.

word-devices	assemblage
[INSIDE/OUTSIDE]	situations that refer directly to being in the field, confined to the time–space frame of observation (within the physical space of the school) [INSIDE]; or those that open up to external research dynamics, through readings, consultations, and preparation for the field [OUTSIDE].
[SPIRAL]	refers to the idea of a repetitive and similar movement, in which certain techniques of participant observation were tested. The notion of return involves visiting and revisiting the field, repeating observations of its routines and spaces; reworking the writing, reformulating the questions, and rewriting notes – all in the pursuit of multidimensional processes.
[STITCHES]	are methodological, epistemological, and informational entanglements that refer to consultation and research materials, complementing and cutting across them. To stitch is to seek to connect what belongs to one within the other – an approach inspired by anthropology and enacted in architecture, tentatively moving toward new formulations of data production.

Source: Own elaboration, 2021.

The work began with an initial [*outside*] moment within a cross-disciplinary academic setting, during a class led by Professor Soraya Fleischer, from the Department of Anthropology at the Universidade de Brasília (UnB), explicitly laying out the practices, theoretical frameworks, and key concepts for conducting ethnographically grounded fieldwork. Examples of participant observation were presented, along with suggestions for technical approaches and forms of interaction. This meeting served as a guiding framework for research in spatial and temporal mosaics, offering a broad explanation of the importance of two tools that would later become central to our methodology: the field notebook with in situ notes, and the field diary. Following this discussion, we turned to two key texts: Carlos Brandão's *Reflexões sobre como fazer trabalho de campo* [Reflections on How to Conduct Fieldwork] (2007), and Urpi Uriarte's, *O que é fazer etnografia para os antropólogos* ["What Does Conducting Ethnography Mean for Anthropologists"] (2012):

[...] I find it deeply enriching to spend a period of time – depending on one's availability, which might be just a day or two, or a week, even fifteen days, or perhaps up to a month – of pure personal contact, ideally even in affective intimacy with the bars, the streets, the houses, the people, the animals, the

rivers [...] and so on. Living alongside them attentively peering into that context is what I would call the first level of sensing: sensing how the place feels, *how the people are, and how I allow myself to be drawn in. This is very valuable, because it enables us to enter through the front door – and to do so slowly.* [...] (Brandão, 2007, pp. 13–14, our emphasis).⁵

Thus, in the first stage, our task is to collect data in the form of descriptions. We describe everything in detail. We transcribe long testimonies. We go around “pursuing subtle people with obtuse questions,” *writing everything down because we do not yet know what will actually be important.* If archaeologists are always carrying a rope and urbanists are always sketching, the anthropologist is always with a field notebook, noting down everything. (Uriarte, 2012, p. 176, our emphasis).

These are introductory texts that focus on ethnographic work for readers from other disciplinary fields (Uriarte), and on participant observation for undergraduate anthropology students (Brandão), rather than as ready-made models or methods to be replicated. One of the reflections most frequently discussed through reading Brandão was the notion of investigative practice, which proposes that the field is not merely a site for collecting data, but a space of coexistence, learning, and mutual transformation (Brandão, 2007) – a place of presence. This perspective helped provide theoretical depth to the *Casas Coloridas* project for students who had not previously engaged with this type of reading or epistemology. The texts complemented one another, like communicating vessels, bridging a more theoretical presentation with one focused on empirical techniques.

A second, non-theoretical stage occurred in a workshop for the manual creation of the field notebooks, using a simple technique for A6-format binding (Figure 2). During the earlier discussion with Professor Soraya and the reading of the aforementioned texts, the field notebook had already been incorporated as a valuable artifact within the fieldwork. The workshop, held at my home during the holidays, proved to be an important occasion for the group to get to know one another better and to establish more personal connections. The notebooks produced throughout the project became a device, in the Foucauldian sense, of *machines for making things visible, for giving a voice* (Deleuze, 1988) and was highly valued by the students, who took pride in having made them themselves.

Figure 2: Handcrafted field notebook workshop.



Source: Photos by Marina Carmello, 2019.

We then moved [*inside*] (the school), beginning a period of free observation – with field notebooks in hand, prepared to enter the school, and experiencing the sense of vulnerability that comes with encountering a new environment and a new task. Students

⁵ This and all other non-English citations hereafter have been translated by the author.

were organized into pairs to spend two hours per day inside the school for one week. These pairs were not fixed; they were reorganized and rotated each day, in order to engage with the greatest possible diversity of experiences. The students' presence within the school space during routine activities had been agreed upon with the school association and teaching staff. Each pair's task, with their own field notebook in hand, was to record and collect impressions, sensations, and conversations – writing down everything possible, since it was not yet clear what would ultimately prove significant. In anthropology, writings produced in this way are considered field notes⁶; the field notebook functions as a device for capturing experience. The aim was to take note of everything using the freest, most informal, and most tactical language. Each student assembled their own notebook and, over the course of a week, spent two hours each day observing, noting, recording, and collecting. By the end of this period, the field notebooks “murmured” the experiences of those days and became the personal property of their author; they were not shared with the outreach group.

We returned [*outside*], engaging in a method both precious and generative for anthropologists: the rewriting of the field notebooks, which now became transformed into field diaries. The field diary is a method for reworking the in situ notes recorded in the notebooks. This process occurs at a different moment, within the context of constructing a narrative to be shared, resulting in a more reflective record that articulates content grounded in analysis and the activation of memory. Unlike the field notebook, the diaries⁷ were shared among the group, and read and discussed at the meetings. They generally contained notes, records of dialogues, and impressions, as well as reflections of an emotional or architectural nature (without photographs), sometimes including drawings made during the [*inside*] period.

This first block of outreach activities concluded with meetings that alternated between reading the field diaries and selected texts from the literature to support the systematization of the processes (Santos, 2017; Schensul & LeCompte, 1999). The reading of the shared materials – namely, each group member's individual writings – revealed that curiosity regarding the gestures and dialogues witnessed and shared during the *inside* moments outweighed a more technical exploration of the school spaces. This marked a new approach for research within the field of architecture. Typically, an architect's field visit is limited to tasks such as taking measurements, defining programs of needs and spatial requirements, and producing photographic records. The diaries, however, focused on questions of sociability within the school environment, describing them in terms of intensities and qualities. Some students explicitly expressed in their diaries a sense of

⁶ Field notes are records of a varied nature, usually written, although they may also include photographs and drawings. Their main purpose is to document behaviors, conversations, processes, mechanisms, and structures as they unfold in the researcher's presence or manifest themselves to the researcher. Field notes thus represent data collected through the researcher's direct presence. How to transform observations into written notes is discussed by Schensul and LeCompte (1999) in what they call “tips for creating field notes”. These tips are based on the idea of low-inference note-taking, meaning that notes should avoid value judgments and remain primarily descriptive of actions and situations. Field notebooks are personal and are not shared with the group.

⁷ The reading of the field diaries was previously established as part of the ethnographic procedure, cited in the literature discussed and commented on by Prof. Soraya, and understood as a tool for reflective sharing and the rearticulation of one's own experiences. The notebooks were therefore designed for group discussions, allowing initial observations to be expanded through engagement with the experiences and observations of others. While the process involved individual reading, selected passages were highlighted during the meetings to foster this collaborative dynamic.

discomfort and uncertainty regarding what to include. Meanwhile, during the collective meetings at UDF, they often found it easier to recount situations that had not appeared in their diaries. Conversely, when it came to narrating their experiences of discomfort, they struggled, sometimes choosing not to share the difficulties or antipathies they had described in their diaries.

Below, I present a few excerpts from the field diaries that were compiled and shared, without identifying authorship. The use of the field notebooks and their contents was previously authorized by each student:

The family-like atmosphere also caught my attention. Each time a child entered the school, they greeted the doorman, said “good afternoon,” and sometimes even shook his hand; the parents made eye contact with him, and some even gave him a hug. In that moment, I realized how different and special this school is.

Based on how the children were dressed – and here, prejudice and stereotypes come into play – one might assume it is a school for low-income families. However, when I shifted my attention to the way the children arrived, it became clear that the families’ social class was much higher than I had initially imagined. (Field diaries, 2019).

The social class of the families, along with spatial and behavioral aspects, prompted reflections in some accounts that revealed the students’ own aesthetic and evaluative judgments, both concerning the architecture, perceived as simple within the school space, and in response to the surprising appearance of the well-off families entering through the gate. This dynamic became particularly evident when they considered the architectural style of the planned spatial intervention. One outreach student offered a notably perceptive observation regarding this relationship, writing in the diary about his surprise and astonishment at the appearance of the educators. Interestingly, by the end of the week, this same student had become the one who reported the most interactions, invitations, and affinities with the group of teachers and school staff.

[...] a teacher came to speak with us and asked if we were Priscila’s students, saying how excited they were about the project. At that moment, I realized how welcoming they were, while I had been thinking about many things regarding the space; everything in my mind froze when I noticed the clothes they were wearing and that everyone was barefoot. At that point, I took out my field notebook and wrote: CLOTHES?????

[...] even in this short exchange, we already felt invisible, we both agreed. We commented on our own attire – simple as it was – perhaps we were dressed *too neatly*. (Field diaries, 2019).

The moments of discomfort revealed during the fieldwork, as highlighted in the diary readings, took on a central role, since they enabled more diffuse contributions, often intersecting with a diversity of observational angles. Although not always consensual, these experiences of discomfort, when analyzed through ethnographic procedures, allow for more objective results to be identified – recurring patterns, discernable tensions, or emerging issues related to spatial matters. Their nature varied for each researcher, and gradually the notebooks, with their detailed accounts of everyday life within a preschool setting, collectively assembled a broader set of issues. The students developed autonomy in deciding what they deemed important to emphasize and highlight in their diaries. During

meetings to discuss the diaries, the perspectives of others enriched each researcher's understanding and generated considerable interest and meaning. Each participant approached the experiences of the others with curiosity as they were shared. This interest, in turn, became the driving force for subsequent visits, observations, and writings, which, over time, may well give rise to new tools that support the production of subjectivities aligned with the trajectory of the work, rather than constrained to a narrowly technical intervention.

The experiences reflected in the exercise of writing and in this categorization also provided a foundation for our reflections on the type of data we were able to collect during this first block of activities. More importantly, they helped the students gain confidence in developing the skill of being in the field and acquiring practical experience, in line with Larrosa Bondía's (2002) theoretical framework and his insightful analysis in *Notas sobre a experiência e o saber de experiência* [Notes on experience and the knowledge of experience]. Drawing on the distinction that experience is something that happens to us, rather than something that simply occurs, Bondía argued that information stands in opposition to experience: information leaves no room for experience, is almost its opposite, and is easily conflated with the learning process.

To understand what experience is, it is necessary to trace back to the times preceding modern science [...] and capitalist society [...]. For centuries, human knowledge was understood as *páthei máthos* – learning through and by suffering, through and by that which happens to us. This constitutes the knowledge of experience: what is acquired in the way individuals respond to what occurs to them throughout life, and in the ways we make sense of how these events unfold. [...] This knowledge of experience possesses certain essential characteristics that, point by point, distinguish it from what we commonly understand as knowledge. (Larrosa Bondía, 2002, p. 27).

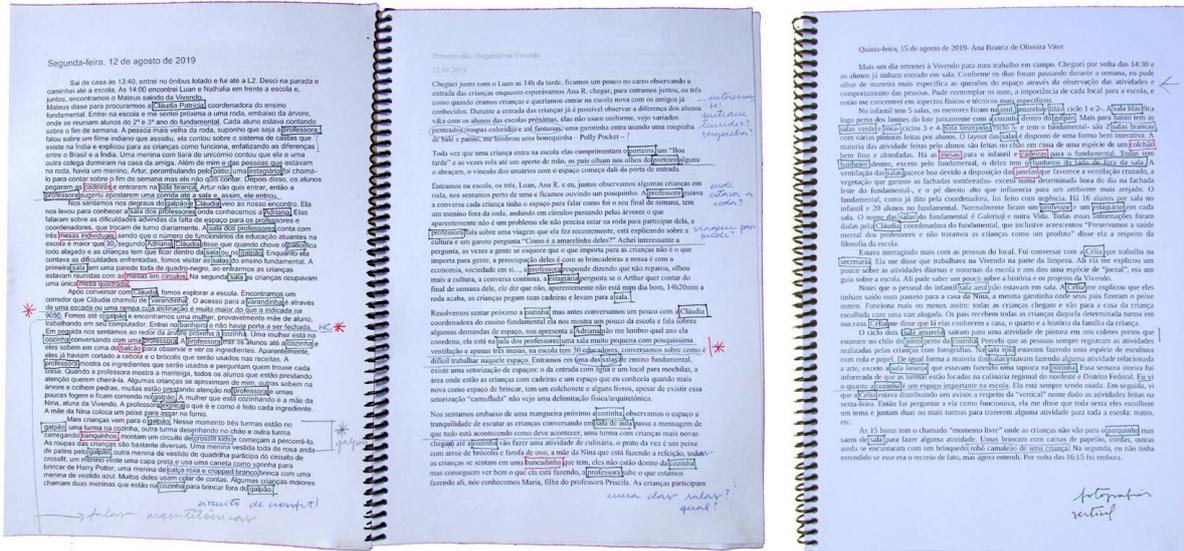
At a subsequent stage of new diary entries [*spiral*], a systematic procedure of visual color coding was adopted, drawing on methods for qualitative analysis of ethnographic data and exploration of the material (Bardin, 2016). Each diary, report, and day of observation for each student was carefully read, and relevant words or expressions were highlighted using colored rectangles (Figure 3), corresponding to predefined categories: *green* for elements of the school's physical space, reflecting perceptions and actions related to the materiality of the environments (warehouse, kitchen, classrooms, bathroom, playground, etc.); *black* for references to people, cited either by name or by their roles within the institution (educators, staff, director, etc.); and *red* for objects, furniture, or items carried by children and adults, allowing inferences about their uses and the practices observed during the activities.

This color coding allowed the data to be organized systematically, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns, relationships between actors, objects, and spaces, as well as emerging tensions in the accounts. At the same time, attention was maintained on the individual nuances of each diary, integrating the interpretive richness characteristic of ethnographic methods, in which meaning emerges both from direct observation and from reflective, collective reading of the records.

After this coding process, only the words highlighted in green – those referring to space – were selected, since this research was situated within the field of architecture and urbanism. The aim was to observe patterns of frequency and accumulation of behaviors within the school space, quantifying and qualifying how often these spaces were

accessed, mentioned, or described in the diaries. This total was then recorded and applied to another activity [spiral] developed by the outreach students: a mental map of the school, produced during one of our meetings at UDF.

Figure 3: Printed field diaries with color-coded markings.



Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

Each outreach student drew a floor-plan of the school space from memory. The mental map⁸ is informed by knowledge-acquisition processes that employ the language of drawing to engage two fundamental structures: perception and memory. While the mental map highlights relations of presence, recollection, location, and affect, it is also grounded in forgetting – revealing the spaces that were scarcely made visible, noticed, perceived, and inviting reflection on the reasons why.

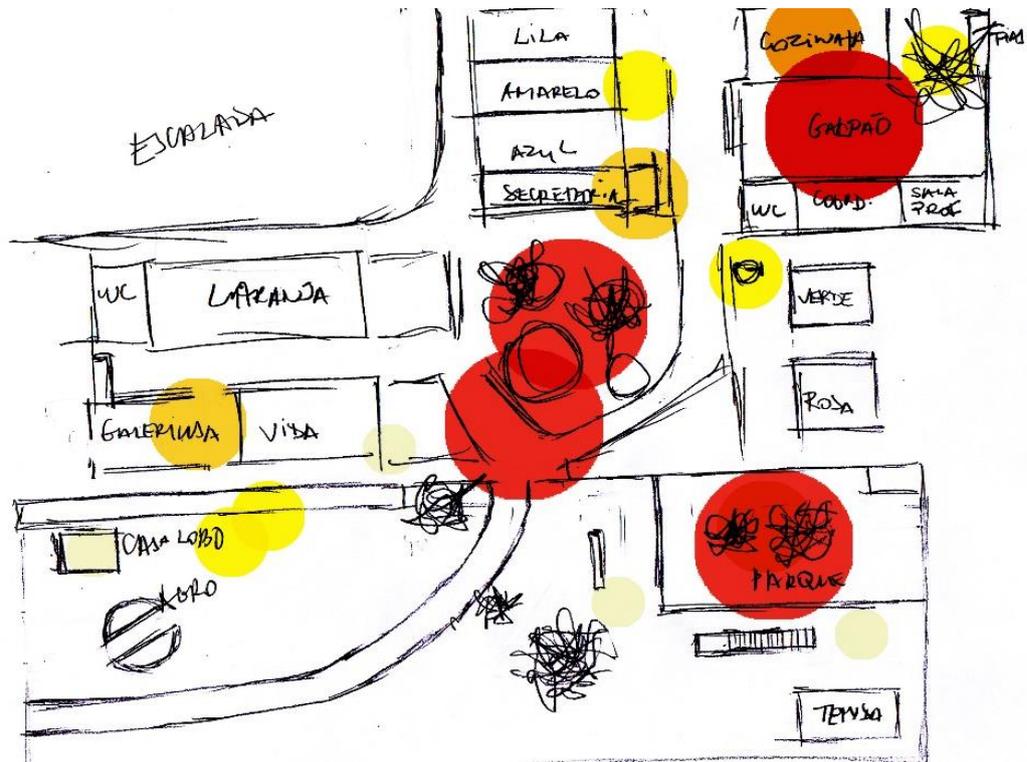
Among the mental maps produced, the configuration judged during the meeting to most accurately represent the dimensional proportions of the school spaces was selected. Heat maps were then applied to this map – constructed from the frequency index of the words highlighted in green in the field diaries – so that overlapping circles would make visible the frequency and relevance of references to the physical space (Figure 4). This procedure enabled the visual analysis to reflect not only the presence of elements, but also their intensity and spatial distribution in relation to the actual dimensions of the environments observed.

The circles accumulated according to the frequency of occurrences and were subsequently translated into graded colors and sizes. The gradation ranged from yellow to red, with the latter visually indicating the “hottest” spaces – i.e., those most frequently cited and perceived in the field diaries, thereby reflecting a higher incidence in the students’ observations and accounts. This procedure made it possible to quantitatively translate spatial references into a clear visual representation, articulating the intensity of

⁸ Derived from behavioral geography, or the geography of behavior, this activity is a conceptual tool focused on the cognitive process involved in spatial perception. It was used by Kevin Lynch in *The Image of the City* (1960) in his studies on the mental image of five American cities (Lynch, 1997). In this context, the mental map is a graphic representation of the outreach students’ spatial perceptions, attitudes, and decisions, functioning as an instrument for analyzing spatial trajectories and experiences.

references and the perception of the environments.

Figure 4: Heat map applied to the mental map of one of the outreach students.



Source: Own elaboration, 2020.

The mental map also spelt out new terminology. In some legends, new labels emerged, such as *spaces for ephemeral situations*, demonstrating that through their immersion in the school, the students were able to perceive “spaces within spaces,” based on the principle that space is not defined by walls, but by the organization of the school’s social life. The children’s spaces were highly visible in both the drawings and in the diary notes: each outreach student used legends to indicate specific details of the children’s interests that had captured their attention. According to Pierre Mayol (in Certeau; Giard; Mayol, 2013; cf. Certeau, 2017), it is the topography of the relational system⁹ that regulates flows in the school. Applying this framework to the analysis of circulation around the school, the spaces highlighted in red on the heat map – *galpão* [pavilion], *parque* [play area] and *praça* [square] – function as anchors of these movements. They receive simultaneous circulation because they gather both children and adults, thereby revealing a lower degree of separation or distinction between users. This visualization not only makes patterns of spatial use evident but also constitutes a point of convergence between teaching, encounters, research, dialogue, outreach, and place.

When we returned for the subsequent [*inside*] stage, we brought the routine of our outreach meetings directly into the school, making use of available spaces – at times, even the ground in the large garden. The development and discussion of the maps and diaries triggered a sensory shift in the research: a need for a more spatial mode of perception

⁹ Drawing on his extensive study of “living” in the second volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Mayol begins with Henri Lefebvre’s definition of the neighborhood as a gateway between qualified spaces and quantified space (Certeau; Giard; Mayol, 2013). From this starting point, he develops analyses of sociability, everyday life, and neighborhood relations. In this study, some of his terms were borrowed to contribute to the notion of in-person, everyday observation.

became evident, bringing to the forefront aspects that were “more locatable”. In a *[spiral]*, we began to review our approaches to the school’s routines, re-examining what had been previously perceived as gaps or interruptions. Thus, through this *[stitching]* process, preparations were initiated for a new *[inside]* phase of fieldwork. By proposing a return to the field in a now semi-structured format¹⁰, the notion of play/other actors was introduced, reflecting the recognition that new methods were required for new observations and new recording formats – now more focused on the spatial analyses of the outreach students’ appropriations. This approach aimed to enable the architecture students to access more comprehensive information, thereby updating their work to the school community’s current needs for spatial adaptation.

The new *[inside]* was constructed in an unusual manner: each outreach student proposed the introduction of an object into the school space, subsequently observing and recording its appropriation, use, and movement throughout the spaces by children or staff. The object functioned as a device within the school environment, intended to expand spatial perception and serve as an observational technology. Drawing once again on Larrosa Bondía’s concept of experience as opposed to information, this was not a moment for prior preparation or forewarning, but rather a deliberate experiment in establishing new creative thresholds.

The multidimensional nature of teaching architecture and urbanism and its intersection with anthropology highlighted the complexity of fieldwork, in which each stage sought reflections through broader and more inclusive approaches, focused on observing the dynamics of appropriation and the meaning-making of school spaces. The stage involving the distribution of objects, for example, proved especially challenging, since it revealed how even the simple act of offering can provoke reflections both for the interveners and on the intervention process itself. Many outreach students realized that they did not know the coordinators, staff, or children well enough to engage proactively in the space, feeling that they had not interacted sufficiently with the community to present an activity that genuinely connected with the space. Furthermore, the absence of established communication channels and with teachers exposed a significant gap in the capacity to discuss spatial proposals, creating a distance between the expectations brought by the interventions and the actual possibilities for interaction with the school’s daily life.

At the same time, careful observation of children’s routines and the appropriation of spaces revealed patterns and practices that, far from being marginal, should inform proposals more closely aligned with the concrete dynamics of the school environment. Thus, the ambiguities of teaching architecture and urbanism – often discussed in theoretical terms – find in the educational space a fertile ground for rethinking pedagogy, thereby reaffirming that the expansion and materiality of space gain purpose and dynamism when they take a central role and engage in dialogue with formative, investigative intentions. It should also be noted that the outreach activities in the field were abruptly interrupted by the covid-19 pandemic. While the premature cessation of these activities was necessary, it carried a dual lesson: on one hand, it highlighted the adjustments required in fieldwork dynamics; on the other, it affirmed that the accumulated experience will endure, prompting future practices to resume with even greater energy and

¹⁰ Schensul and LeCompte (1999) proposed the *semi-structured interview*, which prioritizes personal experiences at the individual level rather than broader cultural constructs. This method is designed to systematically explore areas of a research project that have been previously examined but that require new approaches.

sensitivity, committed to articulating space, education, and collective life.

3 Trends in a teaching practice

This article, which describes some of the stages and methods applied in the *Casas Coloridas* outreach project, concludes with a desire to [*stitch*] together the multiple narratives of outreach practice – the fieldwork, the classroom, the researchers involved, the school community, and the new techniques, theories, and epistemologies. All aspects that could be experimented with, including both successes and failures, consistently underscore fieldwork as a generator of meaning and theory concerning space and relationships in space, thereby serving as a powerful didactic and pedagogical instrument for teaching architecture and urbanism. It is evident that the step-by-step process of an outreach research project, with the singularities and particularities of its trajectory, offers an opportunity to reflect on trends shaping architecture schools, which emerge from: i) the presentation of the problem in urbanism course syllabi, ii) the selection of epistemologies – sometimes strictly technical, sometimes exclusively theoretical, iii) the ways in which space is approached (in the broad spectrum of meanings the term can carry), iv) the tools employed and their modes of interpreting and narrating spaces, and v) the “solutions” proposed for intervention spaces, to be presented as final exercises in design courses.

This reflection on the trends shaping architecture schools – from syllabi, selected epistemologies to approaches to space and the solutions proposed as final exercises – does not remain self-contained. On the contrary, it extends into the classroom, where teaching reveals itself as a living, dynamic territory.

For teaching practice, where critical reflection on a teachers’ methods evokes experience, this text may be received as a modest contribution, underscoring a more reflective approach to architecture and urbanism – one that is more attentive to and inclusive of pre-existing conditions. In this context, such sensitivity is problematized through engagement with the field and its current needs, since field practices are inseparable from both place and the conceptual frameworks underpinning theoretical and epistemological production. It is in this setting that the project “comes to life,” rooted in the relationships established within and through the space, rather than in the aesthetic assumptions or extravagant ideals of architecture often stigmatized as modern.

Although one of the project’s initial objectives was to propose architectural adaptations to the school space, the implementation of concrete proposals through the outreach activities was profoundly impacted by covid-19, and the subsequent closure of the school and our meetings. Largely due to the nature of the methodology and the pedagogical approach itself, this did not lend itself to adaptation, to online or remote formats for the research. This experience demonstrates that fieldwork is not merely preparatory or auxiliary but constitutes the very foundation of theoretical and epistemological production. It is in the field that the architectural project is revealed, intrinsically linked to the relationships established in the space and the practices observed.

The principle that an intervention project should originate in fieldwork rather than on the office drawing board underscores the importance of encouraging and experimenting with field research techniques during students’ training. Such approaches serve as tools for producing interpretive data, intertwined with social and communication theories, from the perspective of a more ethical architectural practice.

There is a clear need for pedagogical transparency and commitment to the outreach objectives: limitations in scope, resources, and time can influence procedures and the critical interpretation of the findings, reinforcing reflection on field practice as a central axis of both education and the design. Thus, understanding the importance of the field should also function as a tuning fork with respect to the outreach guidelines established for higher education¹¹, which emphasize the pedagogical relevance of outreach training by framing fieldwork as a constitutive disciplinary approach, thereby shaping a profile of research with social and ethical significance.

Lastly, this work, which examines research techniques and methods, demonstrates – based on the experience with the outreach students – that the exploratory exercises carried out within the proposed dynamics functioned as experiences of productive contamination, in the sense described by Anna Tsing (2015), where encountering difference generated reflection, a diversity of perspectives, and new ways of perceiving relationships within the school space. These experiences directly contributed to the understanding that the school community’s internal social dynamics are fundamental for revealing how interactions in, through, and with the space are structured and transformed.

Rather than analyzing a predetermined object, *Casas Coloridas*, the doctoral research that motivated the activity discussed in this article focused on mediation, that is to say, on how the intervention becomes a practice of listening, learning, and critical reflection. Hence, the exercises carried out constitute a dual process: on one hand, they challenge the assumptions underlying the professional stance of observing space; on the other, they experiment with more democratic and inclusive ways of thinking about and teaching architecture and urbanism. Conversations with design instructors in curricular subjects confirm the transformative potential of these experiences, demonstrating how active participation in field processes can shape students’ critical and formative perception, expanding sensitivity to the complex relationships that traverse the built environment.

4 Final remarks

At the end of April 2020, the outreach students were invited to write a brief, unstructured reflection on the methodological aspects they considered most noteworthy, with the dual aim of systematizing the process and contributing to the development of the doctoral thesis. Their references to elements such as smells, waiting times, perceived gestures, and the incorporation of emotions reveal that the proposed exercise was not merely a technical procedure, but rather a critical review of education, teaching, and design practice. These accounts indicate an openness to other forms of knowledge, grounded in interaction with different subjects, ways of life, and uses of space. It is important to emphasize, however, that these shifts did not occur spontaneously; they were intentionally mediated by the methodological device, which functioned as a catalyst for new ways of seeing and acting. Thus, the activity was consolidated as a pedagogical resource capable of stimulating processes of observation, derivation, field research, and ethnography, placing less emphasis on the adopted terminology and more on the transformative potential that

¹¹ Resolution No. 7 of December 2018, which establishes the Guidelines for Outreach Projects in Brazilian Higher Education and regulates the provisions of Target 12.7 of the National Education Plan – PNE 2014–2024 (Law No. 13.005/2014). Target 12.7 “aims to ensure that at least 10% of the total curricular credits required for undergraduate programs be allocated to university outreach programs and projects, directing their actions primarily toward areas of high social relevance”.

emerges from the practice of outreach.

[...] At first, the exercise of looking seemed to call for a formal, bureaucratic analysis of space, as is common in our field, but this expectation quickly dissolved. In that context, “our view” did not fit; there was no room for conventional systematizations or pre-established frameworks. Rather than being a specific, isolated process, the experience of contamination in the school generated a series of questions about our field of practice, about the architecture we typically produce and see being produced. One of the questions that affected me most was: “For whom do we produce architecture?”.

Being able to see “for whom” we were producing architecture at Vivendo pulled me out of familiar assumptions. Nothing I might have anticipated beforehand for a typical school project could be applied there – not in the ways commonly employed in “traditional” architecture. I realized that there, who truly determined the space and how it should function were those who inhabited and used it. Not through a superficial or standardized notion of use. (Student testimony, 2020).

Some testimonies reveal difficulties in understanding the purpose of the work, given the expectations around an architectural intervention. It was emphasized, however, that an interest in the act of researching spaces also emerges from the experience. One student wrote: “Since then, I have allowed myself to be ‘contaminated’ by the spaces I frequent; I have started observing more – people and places – paying attention to how they use the spaces they occupy, and I have developed the habit of carrying a little notebook with me. I applied this way of thinking about spaces to my final project for the architecture and urbanism course”.

Based on these accounts, and to conclude the article, the experience opens up two lines of reflection. Observing the temporal dimension of this “contamination” poses a challenge within the usual schedules of courses – how can a space and an extended period of engagement be accommodated within disciplines constrained by short credit hours, particularly in private architecture schools, as in the experience reported herein? How can more specific knowledge be activated within the open-ended idea of the experience and an experimental framework? In my view, these questions point to considerations that transcend any single discipline, yet gain depth through outreach activities that permeate student development in ways less bound by formal curricular requirements, and more open to fostering the spirit of learning and relational depth that academia can offer.

Although it presents challenges in defining the boundaries and scope of fieldwork, the experience also opens opportunities for innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. In this pedagogical and interdisciplinary horizon, borrowing field techniques from anthropology proved demanding for architecture students, since it required a temporal exercise and careful documentation – textual notes, rewriting field diary entries, and continuous presence on site; all unusual practices in architecture schools. Nevertheless, these techniques proved highly contributive to spatial thinking, as evidenced by the students’ ability to produce a mental map of the school space entirely from memory during one of our classroom sessions at the Centro Universitário UDF.

Construction details emerged in the accounts, encompassing masonry concepts, the functionality of the door and window systems, and observations of how external level differences were appropriated – architecture and collective use intertwined. The maps

offered expansive perspectives that translated aspects of the school's political-pedagogical character into the materiality of architecture – kitchen, classrooms, pavilion, playground, steps, sand, shade, etc. The students' perception of the protagonism of unconventional spaces within the school building – such as the creation of territorialities in and through the kitchen – highlighted its role as a well-defined architectural volume, interconnected with almost all other school environments, yet especially significant as a site of invention, sociological significance, and collective responsibility. This emphasis is firmly rooted in the anthropological approach of the research. Without the fieldwork, as it was conducted, the social dimension would not have emerged with such resonance through the “contamination” fostered by hospitality and openness.

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