

***CIRCULAR READING: AN IMMERSIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE IN THE
POWER SKILLS LANDSCAPE***

***LEITURA CIRCULAR: uma experiência cultural imersiva no território das power
skills***

CARVALHO, Maria Margarida Melo de¹

Abstract

Circular or collaborative reading is a synergistic way of orally sharing a narrative. It acts as an amplifier and intensifier of experiences, creating unique sensory experiences within an *omni part* context. Free from mappings and boundaries, it flows from timeless latitudes, giving rise to a construct of relationships, socialization, inclusion, and multiple and variable learning experiences that stimulate open-mindedness and a sense of well-being. It invites individuals to understand the world by embarking on a journey from within themselves, creating colourful and creative scenarios. By promoting active listening, it immerses ideas and experiences in the realm of silence, fostering communication, expanding senses, voices and feelings, making it an interactive and liberating activity. As a decoder of reality, it brings forth empathy and critical thinking, optimizing proficient and cultural skills. Circular reading is an excellent ingredient for developing the so-called power e-skills, and in contemporary times, it assumes a transformative, inspiring, and unifying power, serving as a tuning fork that interconnects different systems, assigning multiple meanings and promoting greater awareness and accessibility in a world of volatility. Circular reading also expands ethical, aesthetic, and critical thinking. Our purpose is to share the idea that circular reading, in conjunction with other active learning activities, gains new *momentum* in the digital context. It fosters critical thinking skills and dispositions in graduate students, potentially contributing to an increase in employability rates. This approach addresses market needs while enhancing the sense of well-being and self-fulfilment.

¹ MARIA MARGARIDA MELO DE CARVALHO. Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro. PORTUGAL. Email: mcarvalhodosreis@gmail.com

Resumo

A leitura circular ou colaborativa é um modo sinérgico de partilhar, oralmente, uma narrativa. Sendo um amplificador e intensificador de vivências, gera experiências sensoriais únicas, num contexto omnipartes. Isenta de mapeamentos e fronteiras, surge fluida de latitudes intemporais, fazendo eclodir um constructo de relações, de socializações, de inclusão, de aprendizagens múltiplas e variáveis, que estimulam a mente aberta e o saber ser-estar. Convoca o indivíduo à compreensão do mundo, numa viagem a partir de si mesmo, desenhando cenários policromáticos e criativos. Ao promover a escuta ativa, faz mergulhar ideias e vivências na esfera dos silêncios, promove a comunicação, amplia sentidos, sentimentos vozes, configurando-se como uma atividade interativa e libertadora. Decifradora do real, faz emergir a empatia e o pensamento crítico, otimizando competências proficientes e culturais. Excelente ingrediente para o desenvolvimento das designadas *power e-skills*, a leitura circular assume, contemporaneamente, um poder transformativo, inspirador e congregador, constituindo-se num diapasão que interconecta diferentes sistemas, atribuindo significações multiplicadoras, potenciadoras de maior consciencialização e promotoras de maior acessibilidade num mundo de volatilidades. A leitura circular expande, igualmente, os pensamentos ético, estético e crítico. É nosso propósito partilhar a ideia de que a leitura circular, em conjugação com outras atividades de aprendizagem ativas, é uma atividade que ganha novo *élan* no contexto do digital, que fomenta as competências e as disposições do pensamento crítico em estudantes graduados, podendo contribuir para o aumento do índice de empregabilidade, dando resposta às necessidades do mercado, aumentando, desse modo, o sentimento de bem-estar e de autorrealização.

Key-words: *Circular reading; High Education; Critical Thinking; Power skills; cocreation value.*

Palavras-chave: *Leitura circular; Ensino Superior; Pensamento crítico; Power Skills.; cocriação de valor.*

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INTRODUCTION

Universities have an increasing emphasis on employability skills and on how to enhance students' work readiness. (Clausen, Andersson & Schaltz, 2020, p. 2).

It is evident that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal and proactive role in societies, not only through the preservation and dissemination of knowledge and culture but also in the way they prepare their students for the new challenges of the labour market and the digital society. As a core part of learning trajectories, HEIs are currently facing a significant wave of disruptive changes, primarily driven by the rapid technological advancements. This demands an open, fluid, and transformative ecosystemic approach. New challenges are emerging from ever-changing, complex, ambiguous, and gradually uncertain scenarios. On the one hand, this calls for proactive and anticipatory conditions, and on the other hand, it requires greater inclusivity, proximity, integration, communication, and greater interaction. This is a new era that expands the territories of teaching and learning, demanding high-level competencies (hard, soft, and power skills) from both students and educators. It leads to the emergence of new pedagogical methodologies that inspire wonder, discovery, and admiration. These methodologies actively and dynamically contribute to the development of critical thinking skills and dispositions, enabling the consolidation of knowledge and skills that promote new societal stimuli and lifelong self-development (Bisri, Putri & Rosmansyah, 2023). According to Cláudia Lopes (2021), the current job market not only values but also prioritizes soft skills, recognizing their significance in entering the world of competitiveness, innovation, and creativity.

In this context, we incorporate circular narrative reading as one of the eligible pillars for empowering and developing certain skills and dispositions necessary to enhance the overall quality of education as a whole and to build the foundations demanded by the job market. By linking the dimensions of assertive communication and active listening as core elements of human development, circular reading represents a true treasure trove of innovative possibilities, firmly rooted in the fertile territory provided by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technological advancements. This holds true for organizations in general and higher education institutions in particular. The combination

of critical thinking skills and digital technologies² will lead to the holistic optimization of community development, maximizing the value of educational quality and societal progress.

Through the flow of generative ideas within epistemic approaches, circular reading emerges as a dynamic and evolving process that gives rise to a new understanding and appropriation of reality. It has the capacity to nourish fresh perspectives, mentalities, and more integrated, fair, and informed decision-making. Under the auspices of Agenda 2030 and the new virtual experiences that technology itself provides, circular reading emerges as a proposition of value, in line with active learning, by stimulating cognitive, emotional, and attitudinal capabilities. Advances in technology and artificial intelligence (AI) create new anchors for the (re)emergence of the digital narrative genre as a cornerstone of the information landscape, individual engagement context, and the development of substantive connections. The essence of each individual is imbued with various timeless narrative pieces, determining links, dynamic constructs of interaction, and expansive systems of connective networks.

The use of storytelling techniques involving strategies to evoke emotions and desired outcomes has become a contemporary phenomenon (Shelbees Company, 2023)³, positioning itself as a system of transformational, cultural and experiential value. Despite being an ancient practice in alignment with human evolution, circular reading stands in today's world as a diversified and distinctive learning model capable of bridging gaps and effecting differences that, in turn, establish new impacts on higher education and on economy as a whole.

In this essay, we will address the importance of circular reading in the modern world, exploring a range of possibilities and value propositions that it inherently contains and feeds upon in this volatile world. It calls for the use of generic critical thinking skills such as questioning, argumentation, assertive communication, and co-constructing ideas to improve the quality of decision-making really crucial for higher education students and

² Nowadays, with technological advancements, digital narratives have been asserting their power, expanding their reputation, and becoming a privileged and immersive way to interact and consolidate skills. *"Traditional storytelling has the charm of cultural heritage and the personal touch of a storyteller's presence. On the other hand, digital storytelling harnesses technology to enhance the storytelling experience, offering a visually rich and interactive narrative. (...) Both narratives have the power to captivate and inspire"* (Bakhtiary & Behzadi, 2023, p.1).

³ Shelbees company (30 jun 2023). Storytelling as a service: unleashing the power of narrative. <https://shelbeescompany.com/f/storytelling-as-a-service-unleashing-the-power-of-narrative>

their careers (Van Damme, Zahner, Cortellini, Dawber & Rotholz, 2023). This approach offers substantive benefits in terms of leadership and teamwork (Din, 2020). When active learning is co-constructed, there is inherently deep engagement from all students and stakeholders involved, leading them to discover the development of their own learning processes, fostering strong, credible, and critically informed opinions, generating substantive and meaningful connections, making it an activator of relationships (Vespone, 2023).

Why circular reading?

Humans have been telling stories for thousands of years. It is ingrained in our DNA. (...) Why is storytelling so important? The answer lies in our brains. Neuroscientists have discovered that storytelling activates multiple regions of the brain, including those responsible for language comprehension, sensory experiences, and emotions. (Schoemaker, 2023, p. 13).

Life is a construct of narratives. Human beings are naturally storytellers and characters who participate in them, etching the narratives that evoke emotions and paradigms into their memory with a fiery stylus, whispering slowly and gently, carrying them to other worlds. Stories, according to Hubert Schoemaker (2023, p.1), “(...) have the power to transport us to new worlds, evoke emotions, and create lasting impressions” They promote authenticity within each of us because each one of them “(...) (re)enchants, fosters the sensitive, the spontaneous, and awakens the desire to be an eternal learner” (Fernandez et al., 2021, p.514), respecting plurality and difference through unique and cathartic moments.

Telling stories is a timeless art (Hussain, 2023) that captures the human experience (ThisNThat, 2023)⁴. Listening to stories is a sublime experience. Both inspire the dwelling of being, turning the absolute void of time and space into unparalleled richness. Without boundaries or formats, stories have the power to tear through the universe,

⁴ <https://medium.com/@jamiebrandon02/the-power-of-storytelling-unleashing-the-magic-of-narratives-6cfaba6742d7>

expanding the ontognosiological journey. They carry immersive and ancestral experiences, establishing bridges between the past, present, and future. They enable transformation and the generation of new perspectives, the idealization of dreams, and the definition of new ideals. By stimulating cognitive areas such as memory, listening, attention, and problem-solving, they also help us build and strengthen the structuring systems of communicative vessels of the holistic self and its relationship with reality. Circular reading goes beyond simple linear reading and entertainment. It extends beyond being a mere cognitive and verbal process; it encourages the exploration of various perspectives, stimulates imagination, fosters the sharing of substantive experiences, solidifies connected and diverse knowledge, promotes active listening, reconfigures social interactions, and is grounded in the foundational ingredient of critical and creative thinking. It is an evolving and dynamically co-creating metaphor that generates value. Circular reading is a transtextuality, "it is a critical relationship par excellence that is established through the appeal that a text makes to its interpretation" (Ceia, 2009, sp).

Critical thinking is seen as a driver of a country's economy and culture, revolutionizing behaviours, attitudes, standards, and ideas through its capacity for questioning, argumentation, and innovation throughout diverse experiences and pluralistic contexts (Ruano-Borbalan, 2023). Critical thinking is a skill demanded of students for both their personal and professional lives (Bezanilla et al., 2019). On the other hand, circular reading stirs and unsettles, systematizes and organizes, imparts wisdom, and resonates with *touch point* practices. It heralds change, inspires empathy, and invites us to participate in the art of weaving the collective imagination, shaping our identities and *modus vivendi*, giving meaning to our experiences, and projecting our perceptions of the future. "Narratives provide a framework that helps us understand the world and give meaning to our experiences. Through stories, we navigate moral dilemmas, explore universal themes, and understand the complexities of the human condition. This sense of coherence and meaning enhances our engagement and connection to the narrative".⁵

⁵ The Power of Storytelling: Unleashing the Magic of Narratives (2023).
<https://medium.com/@jamiebrandon02/the-power-of-storytelling-unleashing-the-magic-of-narratives-6cfaba6742d7>

The multidimensionality of the power of narratives and their impact on individuals, cultural and society emerges from their transformative nature, and this has been reclaimed in the context of managerial and economic activities, with a strong presence in marketing and branding (ThisNThat, 2023). Storytelling is seen as a "Service," a *service system*, due to its influence on audience engagement, experiential involvement, inspirational action, and its ability to connect with meaning (Shelbees Company, 2023). Strategies in its use are involved in achieving results in the process from product definition to sale. "By creating narratives that relate to people's aspirations, desires, and experiences, marketing professionals can influence consumer behaviour and shape the brand perception⁶." Seen as a value co-creation process, this concept of Service⁷, combined with circular reading, reaffirms the mutual benefits among the actors involved in the transmitter system of well-being feelings.

Circular reading is a unique form of interaction, a connector of relationships. Its centre of action lies within human nature (A4A) and their stories. Positioned within the framework of the A4A model (Polese, Pels, Tronvoll, Bruni & Carrubbo, 2017), this dynamic, systemic, and iterative process of reading that involves actors integrating resources (operant and operand), within a specific context of radial exchanges, seeking to share mutual benefits for value co-creation, presents itself as a matrix that is not only osmotic but also flexible and permeable to different contexts. "The A4A relationship involves value co-creation based on actors integrating their resources and acting with intentionality to obtain value by providing benefits to other parties and by belonging to the emergent viable system" (Polese et al., 2017, p. 1048). In this sense, as an emergent and structuring system that encompasses everything and everyone, circular reading constructs value through intentional modes of delivery and diverse participatory engagements, involving reciprocal and interactive experiences, using the art of speaking and listening as a motto of its differentiation. At the heart of the art of storytelling lies the talent for establishing a culture of communication, building relationships, engaging the audience, promoting open-mindedness, generating empathy (Kloefkorn, 2019), and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Service Dominant Logic (SD-L) paradigm is a management approach centred on a transdisciplinary model, indicating that the concept of Service (singular) is a specialized application of knowledge and skills for the benefit of all actors involved (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 2016). Viewing circular reading as a service through the lens of SD-L, and considering it as a value proposition that generates benefits for the involved and beneficiary parties (A4A system), it makes complete sense to adopt a forward-looking approach to the dimension of collaborative reading as a holistic Service.

empowering individuals for transformation through expansive, regenerative, and transformative networks created by the multitude of relationships, symbols, rituals, ideas, cultures (Rivera, 2023), and sensory experiences that give meaning to the different worlds being co-constructed. This openness to diverse perspectives enriches our way of observing and understanding the world, making us more tolerant, receptive, and responsible beings. Circular reading has the potential to promote the construction of strong and viable relationships.

The metaphor of the reader-listener as a co-creator

Critical reading means reacting critically to what is being read. It is an act of establishing a relation among the reading content material and personal values, attitudes and standards (Din, 2020, p.1)

Reading is a cognitive skill that helps us understand, interpret the world, and get to know our roots and identities better. Collaborative reading is an ongoing dynamic process that encourages us to communicate assertively and listen actively to others, allowing us to be filled with wonder, admiration, and affection. Reading in a circle is not just a geometricspatial designation. It is an interactive and creative way of being that enables us to merge into another space and time, for the other and with the other, "...because we believe that, during the reading process, subjective content can emerge and make students' experiences more meaningful, while allowing them to construct and (re)signify memories, life stories as a natural process" (Oliveira & Rodrigues, 2021, p. 257). Critical thinking involves an open-minded disposition and various skills, namely assertive communication and active listening, which are required today both in lifelong learning and in the employability and professional careers of graduate students.

Critical thinking is a central theme in higher education and is relevant across all levels of education. It means having the ability to gather, evaluate, and use information appropriately and critically (Din, 2020). Critical thinking is a self-directed and selfdisciplined form of thinking that strives for the highest quality of reasoning in a fairminded way (Elder, 2007). Through strategies suitable for the purpose, circular and participatory reading can bring together and activate latent abilities within us. Circular

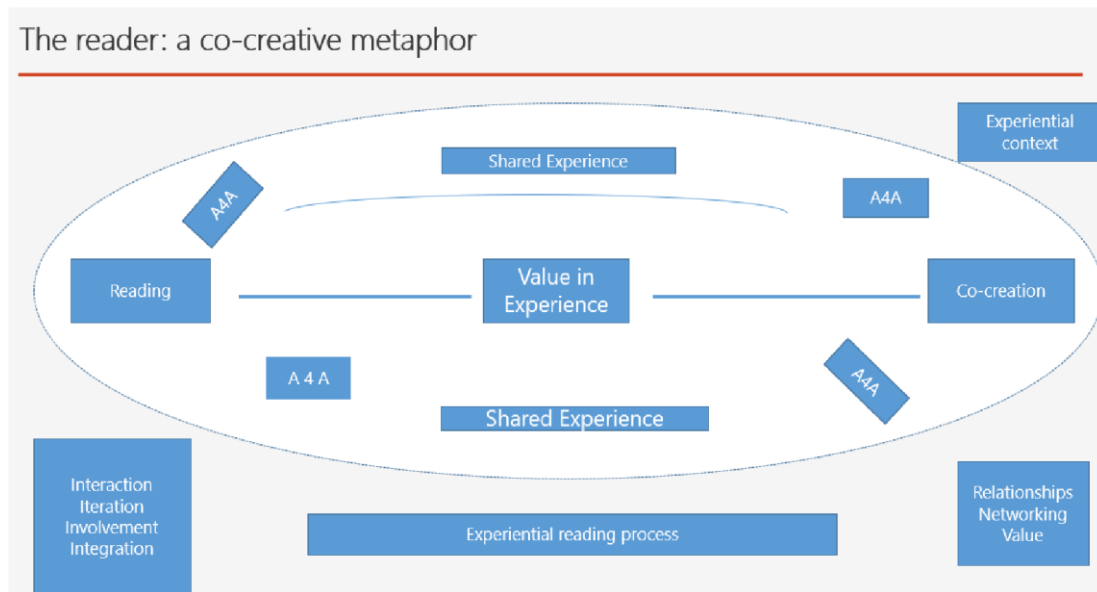
reading is a fundamental pedagogical strategy for the development of critical thinking. When we expose ourselves to different perspectives, we are challenged to question assumptions⁸ and critically examine presented ideas. We enter the realm of cognitive and affective proactivity, mental rigor, expanding skills, turning them into powerful constructive tools (power skills). Such proactivity involves optimism and resilience that enable us to manage stress, uncertainty, and adapt to circumstantial changes (Prince, 2020). According to this author, and from the perspective of experiential learning, we should develop seven essential competencies for full integration into the job market and our professional careers, namely adaptability, critical thinking, empathy, integrity, optimism, proactivity, and resilience. These seven competencies will allow us to connect, communicate, and interact with others more confidently, which are essential elements for well-being and personal and group fulfilment in this demanding and complex world. Through circular reading⁹, we are encouraged to question, analyse arguments, identify fallacies, seek evidence, give and attribute meaning, interpret hermeneutically¹⁰ in order to support our opinions. Attentive reading allows us to assess the credibility of information, so an open, assertive, and authentic attitude should guide our behaviours.

This approach enables us to reflect and filter information, refine the reliability of decisionmaking, eliminate misinformation or fake news, detect manipulation, and engage in constructive debates with an open mind, with an inclusive attitude, and adaptability to change. Furthermore, the experiential process of shared and circular reading involves a system of networks and interactive relationships, engaging all actors in a multipart channel and integration-inclusion as a whole, increasing the impact of value, as shown in the figure 1 below:

⁸ Socratic questioning is a deeper mode of thinking; it's a disciplined questioning technique that allows you to analyse in multiple directions and with different purposes. According to Paul and Elder (2016), this methodology enables us to explore and analyse situations consciously, objectively, and systematically, avoiding biases and gaining new perspectives on reality. By using this method and integrating it into circular reading, we are opening our minds (open-mindedness), fostering dialogue, and empowering our thinking.

⁹ Circular reading is seen as a collaborative learning activity. In this context, and as Ruys et al. (2014), cited in Warsah et al. (2021), highlighted in their article, there are 5 elements that align perfectly with this pedagogical activity: direct interaction, positive interdependence, responsibility, social skills, and assessment of learning.

¹⁰ Brites (2021) tells us that Cecilia Bajour talks about the co-creation of interpretation between those who mediate and those who read and listen to the reading. Further, Brites comments on what Bajour conveys to us, stating that "shared reading and the co-creation of interpretations only remain alive if they respect plurality, without guaranteeing answers to all the perplexities, and certainly not by claiming that only one answer is valid."

Fig.1. Value proposition, experiential service, and value co-creation.

Competencies, skills, and dispositions in the construct of circular reading

“(…) creating a classroom that encourages collaboration, open dialogue, and an acceptance of diverse beliefs and perspectives. Students should be allowed to openly express their opinions, and educators can encourage critical thinking behaviors and attitudes through effective modeling of those behaviors” (Živković, 2016, p.107).

Competence is understood as “the integration and mobilization of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, and values developed when solving problems” (Benazilla et al., 2019).

According to Bersin (2020), the *skills* of the future, those that are and will be most valued in the market economy, are rooted in behavioural skills, critical thinking, metacognition, and problem-solving, precisely where the competencies to be developed fit and can be explored through activities such as circular reading. Circular reading involves experiential and collaborative learning. It allows for the construction of the knowledge process through active methodologies that value focus through debate, argumentation, correlations, interaction, emotions (La Scala et al., 2022), and assertive communication and listening.

One of the deep and complex topics on the agenda relates to the imperative need for *reskilling* and *upskilling*, essential to boost competitiveness and growth. If *hard skills* taken as technical competencies of the individual who learns while in progress are relevant for advancing in his career and professional progression, *soft skills* are equally crucial, as they are interpersonal and behavioural competencies that underpin technical skills and prepare students for their future working life. *Soft skills* encompass attributes such as assertive communication, active listening, emotional intelligence, empathy, openmindedness, patience and leadership. Ecological sense, justice, ethics as well as the care for the other join them together. All these skills prepare students for the constantly changing and challenging work environment. *Power skills*, on the other hand, are the key to differentiation, as they represent talent, deep self-awareness, self-esteem, which prove to be highly selective competencies in the corporate world. They also include the ability to handle pressure, setbacks, and adversities, teamwork, creativity, everyday problemsolving, courage, self-discipline, leadership, and critical thinking.

A reader-listener is someone who possesses the congregational and revitalizing possibilities capable of (trans)forming that talent, turning it into the deciphering key of their personal and professional career. The reader-listener symbolizes the critical thinker. Through collaborative learning, according to Warsah et al. (2021), they can maximize motivation for learning, cognitive development, and social skills.

As a construct of (trans)formative possibilities, circular reading can expand our intellectual horizons and enhance empowerment (power skills) to tackle the complex problems of the 21st century, nurturing leadership and entrepreneurial spirit and preparing students to be innovators, communicators, creative thinkers, and critical thinkers. "(...) the emphasis is on the need to prepare students to be communicative, collaborative, creative, innovative, to think critically and analytically, and to be able to effectively solve real-world problems" (Živković, 2016, p.102). The focus of our proposal aligns with the inclusion of innovative pedagogical methodology, such as the practice of circular reading, which allows for the expansion of this possibility, calling for the reinforcement of skills in interpretation, analysis, inference, evaluation, explanation, argumentation, and selfregulation (Živković, 2016, p.104).

An experiential value proposition under the umbrella of reading

When the public health policy of lockdown or forced quarantine emerges as a preventive measure imposed to contain the infectious transmission of the coronavirus (COVID-19), panic immediately sets in worldwide, along with an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and discomfort, exacerbated by the use of masks and the implementation of physical and social distancing measures. The fear of contracting the virus has altered and affected human beings at the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional levels, invading both family and individual spaces. Communication ceases to flow, either due to fear of contamination or due to its impracticality caused by the use of masks. In this context, a unique opportunity arises for companies and organizations in general to innovate and develop alternative ways of relating and interacting with the market, supported by the expansion of new digital and virtual technologies that have comfortably established themselves in a conducive environment for their development. Suddenly, all citizens are 'obliged' to resort to other forms of remote communication by adopting the new technologies of the 4th industrial revolution (Marr, 2020). The economy is disruptively pushed towards change, and all organizations must adjust to the new reality, inevitably, under the risk of their own extinction, transforming their *modus operandi*.

Human actions are immersed in a vast ocean of narratives, which are the constituent elements that shape the substance and meaning of each life journey. These human narratives differentiate and give value to each individual. From the micro to the macrocosm of societies, the whole world has been affected, and a great opportunity has arisen to innovate and (trans)form processes, procedures, and mind-sets, restructuring economic, sociological, cultural, anthropological, and epistemological fabrics.

The Challenge

In the course of the year 2020, in the midst of the pandemic context, the first idea emerged to create something that would dispel panic and fear that would fill homes with points of light, that would invade personal voids with different colours, and that would nurture hope in people. The objective was, in some way, to reach out to others through bridges of orality. It was a volitive framework that embraced, at its core, a reinforcement of closeness through a storytelling approach, giving full meaning to words and messages through a tonal and rhythmic voice. The goal was to establish connections, to bridge gaps in emptied contexts, adding positive emotions and a sense of well-being in others. The

question began to take shape and emerged through one inquiry: how can one create a remote reading activity, benefiting from the opportunities offered by the digital realm? How can one establish a bridge with others, activating metacognition and new ways of thinking, while simultaneously facilitating the robust development of a positive attitude, leading them towards a realm of catharsis, enchantment, transformation, and well-being through subtle, if not clearly evident, reflective practices? (Sharma, 2023). The idea of creating an online accessible audiobook library begins to take shape. But what type or genre of literature would be introduced? What textual selections? What types of stories?

Among the existing literary genres, the one that best suited the aforementioned purpose was selected. The choice fell on the chronicles of Portuguese-language African writers. Specifically, the focus was on the chronicles that the “Visão” magazine published weekly, as their content and framework aligned perfectly with the intended purpose.

How to leverage this available resource with a focus on the citizen

What determined the choice of the literary genre chronicle? What was the basis for this selection? By its nature and equally by a set of considered and favourable characteristics to the initiative, such as, i) presenting a prose writing; ii) being a short textual genre, with dimensions of one and a half pages; iii) being a genre that falls between the journalistic and literary; iv) its informal structure and current topics; v) using straightforward and accessible language, making them suitable for all audiences; vi) its engaging narrative style, capturing the reader-listener's attention; vii) opening new horizons and stimulating imagination, inspiring the creation of new narratives based on the context that can lead to transformative and memorable experiences for the audience.

What resources should be used for the development of this idea?

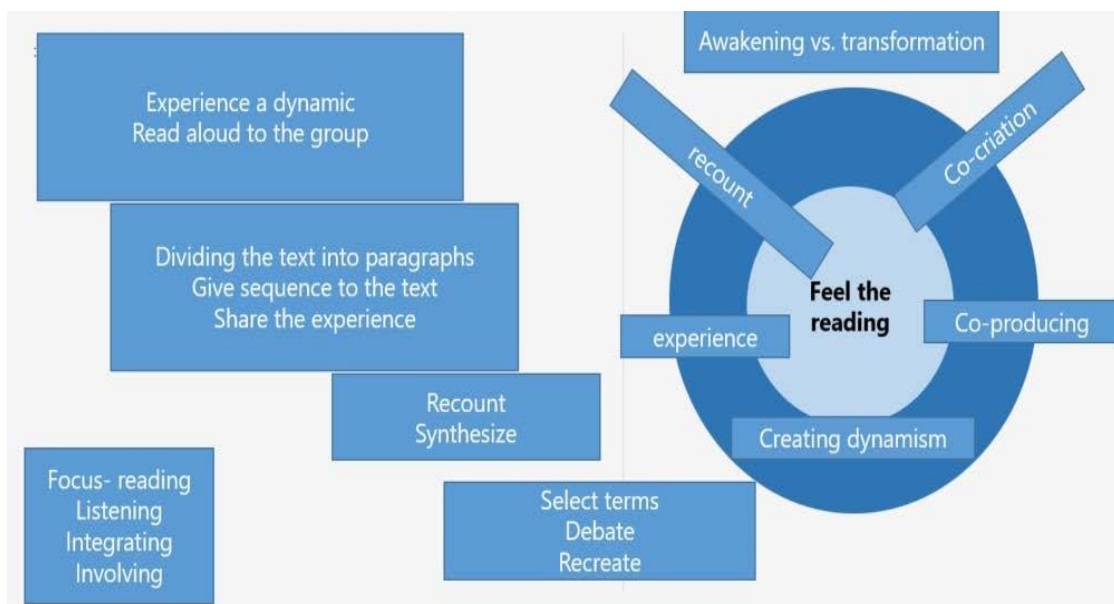
The operant and operand resources at hand upon¹¹, a conceptual designation that aligns with the Service-Dominant Logic (SD-L) (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016), allowed for the use of a voice capturing instrument that records sounds in a physical format. This made it possible to record and create a digital archive with 75 chronicles from different writers, along with their corresponding digitized documents, forming a digital library. The original idea was developed and disseminated, resulting in the establishment of a small audiobook library. Over the course of almost two years, weekly audio readings were produced and made available within a closed network, limited to the academic community. The audio device was used as a disseminating and promotional tool to cultivate a love for reading, appealing to actors-participants-readers-listeners as creative and empathetic agents. The project aimed to expand the universe of potential readers, students, and graduates to enjoy moments of pleasure and well-being through oral listening, in their native language, while also stimulating their imagination and the development of critical and creative thinking skills. The plan involved a weekly reading of a chronicle, recorded in audio format, as a means of diffusing and intensifying emotions that could be repeatedly listened to. This resource was available during the chronological period of 2020-2022. Meanwhile, in 2023, the possibility arises to develop another activity, nearly identical to the previous one in terms of challenges but with different nuances, thereby expanding the spectrum of possibilities. This activity, known as "Circular Reading," could encompass all the strengths of the previous project, enhancing power skills in university students during their undergraduate education. In other words, the objective would be to create an environment conducive to active learning through strong interactions and sharing, optimizing assertive communication, fostering active listening, exploring the ability to synthesize, argue, express viewpoints, retell, and

¹¹ It is important to contextualize the underlying paradigm behind these notions that leverage collaborative value. The creation of value, according to Vargo & Lusch (2004, 2008, 2011, 2016), emerges from the integration of operant resources, which are intangible and invisible forces, such as knowledge, skills, motivation, and values of the actor themselves, and operand resources, which are visible and tangible forces, including material and physical resources, within the context of interactive exchanges for the benefit of other actors (A2A and A4A). According to FP4 (foundational premise of SD-Logic), operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage, and FP10 states that their value is always phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary. According to Arnould et al. (2006), as cited by Carvalho (2016), operant resources can expand their nature by becoming social operants (relationships and access to communities), cultural (knowledge and competence, imagination, experience), and physical (energy, emotions, internal strength) dimensions. Their action results from interrelational activities and presupposes a copulative and transformative action, "*resources as becoming, not being*" (Pels et al., 2009, p.328).

recreate within an environment conducive to well-being. Under the broad umbrella of Circular Reading (see fig. 2), it would be possible to bring together dormant areas and leverage opportunities, solidifying the most important skills required of future graduates in various academic fields. Preparing students for the future would be the motto.

This initiative was well-received within the institution where I work. Between March 1st and April 12th, 2023, the value proposition was integrated into the program of the 9th Edition of UTAD's¹² Soft Skills Plan, an annual initiative aimed at enhancing the skill levels of its students. The 3-hour session was a pioneering initiative titled "An 'Immersive' Experience in the Act of Reading"¹³. It was attended by 88 students from a wide range of courses offered at that institution of higher education.

Fig. 2. Reading aloud in a circle.



¹² The University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro, abbreviated as UTAD, is a higher education institution located in the northern interior of Portugal. It has approximately 8,000 students and offers 1st, 2nd, and 3rd cycle programs in various fields of knowledge.

¹³ The preposition "in", used in the title, implies an experiential invitation both individually and as a group, rather than a statement of something already achieved. The student embarks on a quest for a sensory and sensitive experience, calling upon their operant resources, including the mind, cognition, memory, emotion, motivation, empathy, and a sense of inclusion.

What was intended with the designation "Circular Reading"?

The geometric figure of the circle carries a multitude of meanings. From a symbolic and cultural perspective, it represents the universe, cosmic order, unity, completeness, transformation, life, eternity, and perfection. This circular image expresses unity because its beginning and end coincide at the same point. It signifies movement, pathways, and a system of expansion and contraction. It represents dynamic unity. Mythologically, it alludes to the concept of eternal return, centrality, receptivity, withdrawal, protection, inclusion, exchanges, and sharing, as well as germination. This elusive term serves as a multiplier of meanings, allowing the emergence of the idea of congregation, reconnecting the purpose, through words, with the essence of life, "*stimulating and strengthening it...*" (Oliveira & Rodrigues, 2021, p. 274). The circle, as the geometrization of the sacred and as an archetypal matrix of the universe, was the foundation for constructing the title of the session.

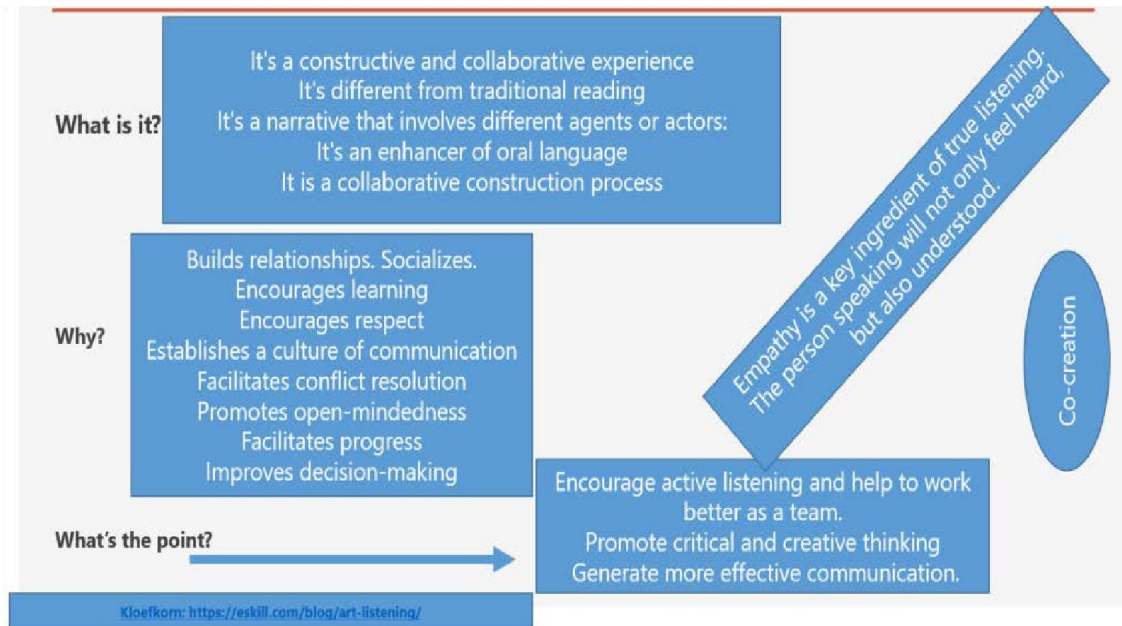
How was the session organized?

Based on the registrations received, it was known that the students belonged to various epistemological areas, including health, mathematics, humanities, biology, engineering, social sciences, psychology, theatre, and more. To promote an activity using group dynamics and active methodologies, it was necessary to allocate a space where everyone could truly engage as beings (in the ontognosiological sense)¹⁴. As Ruys *et al.* (2014, p.10) noted, "*classroom organization interferes with the efficient communication between group members,*" emphasizing the importance of space in facilitating activities. The chosen space is a *locus* of interactions and an incubator of experiences that enhance multidimensional constructs of learning and collaborative pedagogies, such as *makerspaces*, which are considered a *flow of spaces* (Carvalho, 2016).

¹⁴ Carvalho (2016), in her thesis, establishes an ecosystem of metacategories around the concepts of space, place, and state. These concepts encompass relationships, experiences, communication, interactions, and values such as inclusion, freedom, trust, and multiple forms of learning.

After selecting the space-state¹⁵ and considering the number of students present, we structured our proposal based on the core questions about understanding the essence of the proposal, the reasons for its implementation, and the aspirations, as can be seen in the figure below:

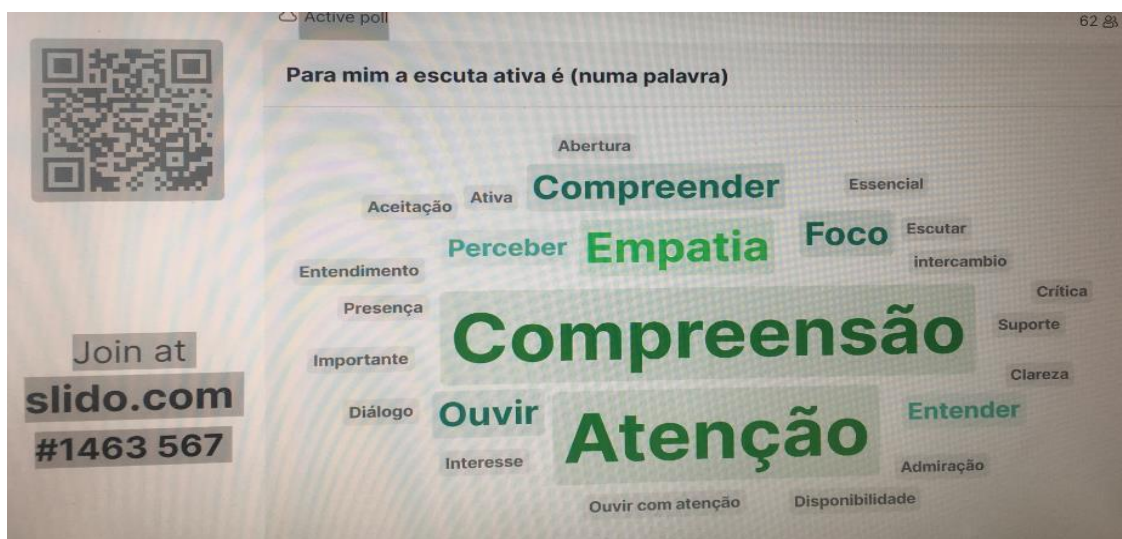
Fig. 3. Circular or Collaborative Reading and Active Listening: Project Proposal



According to Figure 3, the session was planned considering the objectives, the allocated space for the session, and the number of registered students. The first question about "What does active listening mean to you?" was presented in a digital interaction format, using digital resources like SLIDO and a Word Cloud. This task involved the individual contributions of 62 participants¹⁶, resulting in a word cloud, as shown in the figure below.

¹⁵ We will refer to this uniplural space as the "third space": "The literature suggests that there are a variety of benefits to implementing co-constructed/constructivist-based teaching and learning techniques in the university classroom, with additional benefits emerging from the inclusion of third space and sociocultural approaches. In exploring implications for student learning from co-constructed practices, four beneficial outcomes (skill development, engagement, meaning-making, and having purpose) and two core activators (learning through relationships and creation of safe spaces) emerged." (Vespone, 2023, p. 10)

¹⁶ 62 responses out of a total of 88 attendees in the context.

Fig. 4. Individual Responses to the Question 'What is active listening?'¹⁷

The most frequently used words included comprehension, attention, empathy, and focus. Using this word cloud as a starting point, thematic exploration began, prompting university students to think critically about the common outcome. Afterwards, in a structured sequence, the session's plan was presented in a few minutes, explaining the reasons for the importance of the practical activity called circular reading, the choice of the literary genre, as well as the reasons for selecting that author along with his biographical context. After these brief remarks, the purpose of the activity was explained. The students were divided into small groups of 5 members each, resulting in a total of 17 groups of five members and 1 group with four students, making a total of 18 groups in the classroom setting.

The way the activity would proceed required a rule: students who had a close friendship or prior acquaintance should not be in the same group; they would be distributed among the other groups, thus ensuring heterogeneity and epistemic transdisciplinarity¹⁸ (Clausen, Andersson & Schaltz, 2020). In our view, different perspectives, different ways of listening and selecting information, different cultures, and observations could enhance the richness of the content to be presented. The macro-

¹⁷ Special thanks to Professor Caroline Dominguez, for having believed in and given constant support to this initiative and, also in the construction of the Slido and respective data collection.

¹⁸ Clausen, Andersson & Schaltz (2020, p 6) "Teams can consist of student groups, student-and-student instructors, and students-and-lecturers/facilitators. Our main argument is that learning is not a unidirectional process, and that it includes various actors. This is a core argument in Kolb's learning circle, where students learn from a process of experiential learning which transforms observations, experiences, and reflections in order to achieve abstract conceptualization".

purpose was to differentiate to enrich contributions. Next, the procedure was explained: shared reading, with the same text divided into paragraphs, assigning each part or paragraph to each participant so that everyone would collaborate in the act of reading. Each person would read one paragraph and then pass it to the next person, creating an opportunity to continue reading without interruptions—a kind of relay reading with the passing of expressive testimonies. Everyone had to listen, focus, and pay attention to ensure the narrative's fluency. In the end, each person would share what they had gathered from the reading, highlighting or emphasizing the most interesting aspects from their perspective (using analysis and interpretation skills—the hermeneutics of meaning). A leader, designated and chosen by the group, would be responsible for summarizing and orally presenting, in written format, a summary of a maximum of 5 lines (assertive communication, active listening, and synthesis skills), allowing for collaborative construction through the addition of contributions from other group members.

After discussing together (socialization, active listening, memory, interaction, empathy, and teamwork), they would focus on textual recreation (creativity and innovation). Using an interactive digital platform, Padlet, students would express their contributions in writing. In the end, they would evaluate the session anonymously. An appeal was made for critical and constructive participation, highlighting what stood out the most in the session and what each of them considered crucial. The result of participation through the digital tool fell short of expectations. Out of the 88 participants, we only received 26 responses on the platform, which is less than half of the participants, or 29.5%, making any inferences difficult to assert.

Regarding what they highlighted from the session, each participant chose a word, whether simple or compound, that was representative and corresponded to their awakening and experiential learning throughout the session. The concepts, according to the word cloud presented below, included sharing experiences, group work, reflection, connection, active listening, and listening to others (see image below).

Conclusion

Circular reading plays a fundamental role in today's world. As a collaborative synergistic practice, as active pedagogy, circular reading intensifies experiences, critical thinking, competencies, and dispositions (e-power skills) that add value, preparing students for a labour market characterized by its volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and disruptive contexts driven by the speed of information. Circular reading enables the emergence of sharing, integration, and inclusion (SDG - Agenda 2030), empathy, and understanding of the diversity of the world, making students more demanding, critical, and informed citizens, equipping them to solve problems and present new innovation proposals. The dynamics of collaborative interactions enrich knowledge and attitudes and open up the field of critical reading, analysis, and interpretation. Encouraging a love of reading, stimulating and promoting circular reading as an experiential practice can leverage and enhance our understanding of reality and contribute to a more conscious and responsible world. Circular reading can also serve as a tool that prepares students for their personal and professional lives.

We believe this idea of circular reading can yield many fruits in terms of rich experiences, talents, resilience, empowerment, and leadership. Active communication and active listening are highly remarkable ingredients nowadays, making a difference.

Building a culture and a way of being that reinforces active learning, renews competencies, and boosts employability can also be developed through this group experiential practice. Exploring this aspect through contemporary pedagogical practices is a challenge that should be developed and presented as a reference matrix in higher education. The choice of workshop format aiming to increase competencies seems to be a consistent idea. The next step will be planning sessions tailored to the purpose, comparing the differences between competencies before and after the session, and, if possible, developing this activity across all courses and during different academic periods.

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