

"Copying and writing are bad": school for landless children

“Ruim é copiar, é escrever”: a escola para as crianças assentadas

"Copier et écrire c’est mauvais”: l’école pour les enfants sans terre

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how children from the rural settlement of Nova Alvorada do Sul (in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul) understand and think of their school experience. Conducted through observations, interviews and a compilation of life histories of the participants, this study reveals how the students' life circumstances and the challenges they face in acquiring literacy influence their expectations about school and whether or not they will remain in the settlement. While addressing these questions, this article also encourages the discussion of pedagogical proposals for rural and urban educational spaces.

Index terms: literacy – rural education – childhood – agrarian reform.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa os *sentidos* atribuídos à escola por crianças que estudam no Assentamento Nova Alvorada do Sul, em Mato Grosso do Sul (Brasil). A pesquisa - desenvolvida por meio da observação participante, da realização de entrevistas e da coleta de histórias de vida, revela como as dificuldades para concluir o processo de alfabetização e as condições objetivas delineiam (re)construções das expectativas escolares e da permanência dos meninos e das meninas assentados/as nos estudos. Finalizando, o texto apresenta reflexões que favorecem a discussão de uma proposta pedagógica para os espaços educacionais do campo e da cidade.

Palavras- chave: alfabetização - educação do/no campo – infâncias - reforma agrária.

RESUME

Cet article analyse les sens de l'école pour des enfants qui étudient dans un camp de l'état du Mato Grosso do Sud (Brésil). La recherche, développée au moyen d'observation, d'entretiens, et de collecte, d'histoires de vie révèle les difficultés pour conclure le processus d'alphabétisation et les conditions de vie des élèves qui modifient leurs besoins scolaires dans la vie quotidienne à la campagne. Pour terminer, le texte présente des réflexions qui favorisent la discussion d'une proposition pédagogique pour les espaces éducationnels à la campagne et à la ville.

Mots clés: alphabétisation; éducation de la/à la campagne; enfances; réforme agraire.

1. Summary

This article analyzes the reality of a school located in a land reform settlement, from the meanings attributed to the school by the boys and girls who failed to become literate during their time as students there. This topic was developed for a PhD thesis,¹ which identified the difficulties students faced when learning to read and write and how those difficulties interfered with students' expectations for agrarian reform in both the present and the future.

The socialization of the theme aims to contribute to a broadening of the discussions on literacy practices, with a goal of developing *curricula* tailored to rural populations. It also plans to offer subsidies to rethink the politics of education in Brazil, for example, by giving greater weight to student input.

This essay is divided into six items.² Initially, it reintroduces the aspects that relate to the importance of the literacy process for the consolidation of rural settlements. As a result, those who participated in the

1 A PhD thesis, "Landless Children.": (re) construction of the meaning of childhood in agrarian reform. São Carlos: UFSCar, 2006.

² Although there appears to be only five, rather than six, items in this essay, to be true to the original work, we have left it as "six."

study were members of a rural settlement, including children, and the second item of the essay will be an introduction to these participants.

The third item examines the opinions of school children (of differing ages) on how literacy is taught as a resignifier of educational expectations and the future of agrarian reform. The whole topic is included in item four, which reflects on the reality of the settlement, focusing on education and literacy issues. This essay will conclude with some proposals regarding education in both the city and the countryside.

2. Settlements and the literacy process

Concern about education was always present among most of the social movements' actions, since the construction of the "schools of *lona*"³ allowed children to continue their formal schooling. This brings the schools closer to the spaces of struggle and strengthens family unity around the goal to be achieved.

Later, land reform settlers were required to build schools as a key component of creating the "promised land." In some schools of the *Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem-terra*⁴(MST), for example, courses focus on class struggles, guided by Paulo Freire, Pistrak and Makarenko. Already, the Rural Land Commission (CPT) - visualizing the earth as one of God's gifts to His children - does work in basic education and in the deployment of technical schools, among other projects. The schools established by CPT seek to equip students to return to work on the land.

³ *Lona* is a Portuguese word that means "canvas" in English. To call a school a "canvas" school is to allude to its precarious state.

⁴ *Movimento dos trabalhadores rurais sem-terra* in English is "The Movement of Landless Rural Workers," which began 30 years ago and is the oldest existing peasant movement in Brazil's history. This movement reaffirms the commitment to organize the rural poor through land reform.

Demands for an education that was sensitive to the reality and expectations of rural workers were unleashed by movements that saw education as a societal project built by the disadvantaged classes (VARGAS, 2004). To make this possible, rural workers had to confront the prevailing ideology that they did not need to be literate to accomplish their rudimentary labor (RICCI, 1999).

This discussion came to Mato Grosso do Sul before its partition in 1977 into Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul, resulting in the gradual implementation of public policies (JESUS, 2002).⁵ This trend toward greater recognition of rural community needs was hindered by the interconnectedness of land and power in government, specifically the social and political influence that oligarchs had over the making of rural schools which produced policies that clashed significantly with the reality of rural settlements⁶ (SOUZA, 1997). Not all rural schools, for example, developed action plans based on the ideas of struggle advocated by the social movements that helped create the rural settlements in the first place.

In relation to literacy, the theories that oppose mechanistic practices have been present in the schools of Mato Grosso do Sul since the late 1980s - with the influence of Piaget and Paulo Freire evident in official documents. Nevertheless, the paradigm shift has been slow to migrate to rural education because rural children's geographic isolation is interpreted as a mark of inferiority by society at large.

The creation of rural settlements (the result of conflicts in the rural areas of Brazil) has always maintained a close relationship with literacy

⁵ In 1996, the government launched Rural Education – Building a Proposal for Mato Grosso do Sul in order to address the needs of rural education. In 2000, the proposal Basic Rural Education was created from a public education project in collaboration with UNESCO, social movements, unions and NGOs (Jesus, 2002).

⁶ This rural reality included inadequate curriculum, calendar, and methodologies; a lack of policies specific to these regions; and a variety of difficulties faced by educators (Government of the State of Mato Grosso do Sul 2004).

practices because, for workers, literacy is considered a vital tool for achieving their objectives. The realization of these objectives has been seen on various occasions, which confirms the contribution of social work education centered on students' reality, such as the Active School initiatives, the Family Agricultural Schools and the Rural Family Houses (BRAZIL, 2003). Such groups aim to establish schools "(...) whose objective is to develop people, as well as the economy, in rural communities" (GHEDINI, 2009, p. 39).

Despite these efforts, the rates of basic education in rural areas are still permeated by a high rate of imbalance between students' ages and their grade levels, with about 50% of the students older than the standard age for their grade level (BRAZIL, 2003). This contradiction reflects the dissociation of school culture with the needs of those living in rural areas (SILVA, 2004) and the lack of promotion of social redemption. Therefore, we ask:

What is the impact of the ineffectiveness of *literacy* instruction, in the present and in the future, to rural children? What are the consequences of instruction that is not in line with community expectations? And, finally, where should schools be constructed within rural settlements?

These questions are discussed in this article from the perspective of rural children, particularly how their view of school is shaped by their context: the struggle for subsistence, the distance from the city, the obstacles to build their future as farmers and the lack of public policies to meet their needs. The whole process of research was supported by Vygotsky's assumptions, which discuss the concepts of *meaning* and *signified* of words.

(...) the meaning of a word is the sum of all psychological events that the word awakens in our consciousness. It is a complex, fluid and dynamic whole, which has several zones of unequal stability. The signified of the word is only one of the zones of meaning and is the more stable and accurate of them. A word acquires its meaning from the context in which it

appears; in different contexts, it alters its meaning.
(VYGOTSKY, 2003, p. 181)

Thus if learning written language is meant as "(...) a process of knowledge construction by children through practices that have as their starting and ending point the use of language in various social settings" (BRAZIL, 1998, p. 122), whose appropriation requires a set of mediation processes and of other language subjects (LURIA, 1988), the meaning that it has for children is different because it is built on the practical conditions conveyed through formal institutions. These meanings are presented in sequence, taking into account children's reality in a dialectical way, marked "(...) by oppositions, symmetries and asymmetries, in other words, the tensions that are objectified in inexorably provisional syntheses (...)" (ZANELLA et. al., 2007, p. 05).

3. The universe and subjects of the study

The demand for the implementation of agrarian reform settlements in Mato Grosso do Sul was the result of class struggle. Over the course of several historical moments involving disputes over soil, government intentions, and the interventions of squatters, settlers and farmers, the "landless child" was transformed into the "settled child." This contextualization elucidates the origin of the social causes that oppress the settlers even today, which are often ignored by the underprivileged classes.

The research that subsidizes this discussion was developed in *Nova Alvorada do Sul* settlement (PANA), located in the city of *Nova Alvorada* in the state of *Mato Grosso do Sul*. It was here that the research team conducted observations of participants, analyzed documents and recorded the oral histories of adults and children within the context of an 11-year agrarian reform.

After four years of fighting with landless groups, the Rural Land Commission expropriated PANA in 1997. It houses 86 families, whose daily lives are affected by the consequences of Brazil's policies on land reform: the indifference of authorities, the regular delays in funding, the expropriation of unproductive land, the lack of support from social movements and the demands of the market, among other consequences. Children living in these areas are conditioned by such factors and their time at school is one revelatory example.

We observed that in the settlement there are many "childhoods" whose characteristics are governed by the fruits that the earth provides or denies them: the childhoods of the rural workers' children, the landowners' boys and girls and the children simply living on the land are markedly different. All of their lives are controlled by the lack or abundance of land and its impact on their family's employment opportunities and income.

Upon completion of the investigation, the "settled" families reflected on the role of the school from the perspective of the school's objective conditions as well as their children's needs. Generally, when children were minors, parents, particularly the mothers, worried about the effectiveness of how the alphabet was taught. Therefore, school was considered an opportunity to ensure a good future for their children.

The *data* reported here were gathered from student testimony recorded by the school district Superintendent *Luis Meneguel*. All student names have been changed to preserve the students' identities. These children, who expressed their expectations and questions about their school, were four to fifteen years old and illiterate. Testimonies of family members and teachers were complementary sources of *data*.

The rural school studied for this research offered elementary and middle school (K-8) to not only the students who lived in the settlement but also to students who lived on farms or in a camp for those without land. Some of them walked for hours along harsh roads to get to school. Since the

“landless” families also participated in the fight against the unequal distribution of soil in Mato Grosso do Sul, they were grouped with farmers.

However, the poor academic results and the high rates of illiteracy that characterized rural schools altered students’ perception of school. Thus, while school was viewed as a way of fostering independence in the students, its inadequate infrastructure (both inside and out) made it an unattractive option for families. Given this situation, parents encouraged their children to seek opportunities outside of their rural communities. These circumstances generated a contradiction: the children’s labor was essential to the family’s survival on the land, but the impossibility of remuneration - and to an even lesser extent remuneration in the form of land - drove them to seek their livelihoods elsewhere.

The members of the settlement who had had the experience of fighting for the settlement with the support of CPT, such as was the case with the “landless” leaders, worried that the school was removed from their history and their values concerning agrarian reform. Therefore, they feared that their sons and daughters would be ashamed of their “landless” cause.

The basic teachings of the school do not align with our principles. (...) We come from a long struggle and we came together in search of better days and our children sometimes say that the teachers tell them to ignore that. (Mr. David)

The educators’ point of view was also considered for the research, in regards to their relationship with the world of agrarian reform. The rural schools in *Mato Grosso do Sul* took part in the struggle for land and so did the teachers of PANA, who shared with the researchers their unique dual status: public employees and herders. These settlement teachers also faced many challenges, including low pay, feckless education policies, drought, delays in funding and the price of milk. Since many of the teachers were from cities, most had not experienced the movement and the struggle that

had led to the creation of the settlement, so they were unaware of the role that agrarian reform played in the students' lives and thus in the classroom.

Given all of this, the school curriculum did not address the particularities generally attributed to rural institutions by social movements. The teachers believed that their students had the same capabilities of city children, yet they identified some limitations because of their lack of contact with the urban world. According to the teachers, among the causes that triggered such large numbers of students to repeat grades and be illiterate were 1) the manual labor that the children had to do from time to time that disrupted their school attendance and 2) the absence of family support in assisting students with homework.

Moreover, the teachers were not given clear direction over what and how to teach: What must we do? Should it be guided instruction on conventional subjects and/or on farming techniques? Must we mix a regular *curriculum* with discussions on territorial inequity in Brazil or should we build a specific *curriculum*? Where do we begin this discussion?

4. What children thought about their school

"I only know how to read one word. This other one, I don't know... "

Difficulties related to literacy acquisition were a common concern among children interviewed for this study, providing key insight into the education system of rural settlements. The older students disliked the activities the teachers had developed. Among the students was 12-year-old Diogo,⁷ who was repeating second grade for the fourth time. Eight of his peers had also been held back and half of his class had not mastered the technique of reading.

Diogo and his 10 year old cousin Fabio described learning the alphabet as tiring and complained that the students did not receive much

⁷ The names of the children have been changed.

help from the teacher: "She only writes and does not teach. She reads and does not help us to read." Another criticism the boys had was the excessive copying they were required to do: "The teacher writes on the blackboard. We copy. She puts something else on the blackboard, we copy, and then she puts others things (...). When she arrives, she gives us more stuff [to do]." Their workbooks covered exercises aimed at teaching the content. Their worksheets were completely filled with the "stuff" copied from the blackboard, but their interpretation was incomprehensible, since the children were not literate. As Diogo explained, "I only know how to read one word. This other one, I don't know..."

The teachers attempted to break down the literacy process by focusing on teaching syllables and other exercises, but these strategies produced no positive results. This model was extended to students in the kindergarten room as well.

Many strategies proposed for reading instruction were mechanically developed, focusing exclusively on repetition exercises. To study the vowels, for example, the mimeographed worksheet asked the children to relate a drawing of a bus to the letter "O."⁸ They first colored the drawing and then completed five lines of tracing of the capital letter "O." This assignment did not offer any linguistic meaning. One of the girls, Bianca, interpreted the letters "Os"⁹ as the "tires"¹⁰ of the vehicle. Uninterested, the children walked around the room, talked, and sat under their desks. At times, they scribbled and tore the worksheet whose objective was completely removed from the social function of communication. Such

⁸ "Bus" in Portuguese is "ônibus" and thus the use of the word bus to teach the letter "o."

⁹ "Tires" in Portuguese are "pneus." Bianca, like the other students, was so confused by the exercise that she misspelled "tires" and thus her connection of "os" to "tires" (instead of what should have been "eus").

behaviors revealed the children's negative assessment of school just as the older children disliked such writing exercises.

Linked to this mechanistic view of literacy, the *PANA* school was designed in such a way as to afford little time for the children to play; it ignored the contribution of this activity to the students' cognitive and physical development, as discussed by Vygotsky. Play was restricted to brief moments of pleasure in their physical education class and their commute on the school bus.

Concomitantly, the chores that the children had to complete at home and the fact that the children's parents were illiterate aggravated the challenges they faced in learning how to read and write. Such was the case for Diego and Fabio, who complained: "*We work more here on the farm than we play. When our father goes to sleep, we play. When he wakes up, he sends us out to take care of the cows. We go, take care of them, take a shower and go to sleep.*"

Thus from the age of four (kindergarten), some students were building two perceptions of school: it was a boring place where they could sit at their desks waiting for the teacher to lead activities that would involve excessive copying, while at the same time school allowed them a certain distance from their domestic duties.

"I don't know math, but I have good grades..."

In addition to issues related to literacy, our research highlighted the students with difficulties in performing basic mathematical calculations. Among them was seventh grader Adriana, who did not know how to multiply or divide.

Her "success" on school assessments was the result of *provas com consulta*, or open-notes tests and because she often copied her peers' work. Just as with reading and writing instruction, her teacher taught math in a mechanical way, forgetting that, as with any subject, math can not be taught solely through verbal definitions in order to relate the subject to the

students' quotidian reality. These difficulties could be fixed with a re-evaluation of the pedagogical techniques that emphasize the accumulation of mathematical concepts and writing in a decontextualized way, since these techniques do not take into account "(...) any autonomous relationship with the world and do not respond to any particular exigency" (LEONTIEV, n.d., p. 315).

The choice of guided didactic work based on behavioral patterns was not unique to this rural school. It is a remnant of the country's educational system, which is centered around collecting indices of academic failure, an intention that aligns with the way that the alphabet is taught, which, from Vygotsky's perspective (2000) obscures written language.

Especially in relation to kindergarten students, it is important that they have a chance to genuinely experience situations that involve reading and writing, as they have the ability to interact with language. Such teaching should be organized so that reading and writing activities are purposeful and that the act of teaching writing is considered in the same way that speech is considered in relation to thought/image. That would require, by pupils, an analytic action of the sound structure of words, their dissection and the reproduction of their symbols in each sequence. In this process, there is a reason and motive to read and write (VYGOTSKY, 2003) instead of the passive practice of copying and repeating.

4.1. The environment of a special education classroom

Next to the Health Center, the Municipal School Principal *Luis Meneguel* had a small classroom for special needs children, composed of two teachers and six students of differing ages and disabilities. The students had not been evaluated neurologically and although their teachers believed that they could learn to read and write, they did not know how to teach them.

The classroom contained six desks, a cupboard, a small whiteboard, a teacher's desk and a bathroom. Occasionally, the students ventured outside of their classroom to participate in the activities and festivities that the school organized.

Although they were unable to communicate verbally in a clear manner, the children still created resistance mechanisms to ward off unwanted assignments and externalize their feelings about school. Their restlessness expressed displeasure towards the proposed activities and the time necessary to complete them. Their agitation and desire to escape (the classroom door remained locked) meant that the assignments of making holes in paper, ripping up magazines, making paper mache balls, and playing with popsicle sticks and old books were boring and took far too long for the children's attention span.

Nevertheless, on many occasions, the students revealed that they liked school by not manifesting restlessness or a desire to leave. This occurred during field trips, when they played ball, moments when they did interactive activities (stories, music, circle time, running or blowing soap bubbles). The students demonstrated that not only did these situations make them happy but they also triggered learning.

This research revealed that educational practices focused on special education were linked to the broader school culture built in our country.

Historically, the *criteria* that have guided the planning of activities have been moved by a reading that generates an unequal distribution of knowledge, which devalues education as the defining element for students' socialization and integration. Consequently, the "settled" children's education ended up centered around old technical structures that dismissed student learning and emphasized the students' "abnormal" characteristics, preventing real learning, including that inherent in the process of literacy acquisition, which includes the exploration of several forms of communication.

In this sense, explained in Silva (2000) when he affirms that to judge these children's and youth's possibilities for effective learning, we would have to acknowledge that their development occurs in a peculiar way, but not any less than others. One must view them as active subjects and this culminates in an educational activity that is able to break with mechanistic practices. In addition, training and professional diagnosis should supplement educators' preparation. They should be able to reflect on who their students are as they learn and what their potential is. They need to receive support to enable them to distance themselves from the stigma of their students' disabilities, allowing for the appropriation of the social forms of organization of reality, considering the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (VYGOTSKY, 2004).

5. Education in the settlement and literacy: some reflections

The study reveals that the expectations among the settlement families in relation to school will change along with changes in their lives, such as their living conditions, the results of land reform policy, the age of their children and their children's academic performance.

It appears that perceptions of school can be different within the same family, based on educational issues, gender and the number of children.

Many parents encouraged girls' enrollment in school while at the same time supporting boys' investment in another activity, as they are expected to be the future provider of the home.

Likewise, the absence of collective work among the settlers, the removal of the social movement that spawned the settlement, the educators' (lack of) training, the distance from the Department of Education, the need to involve the children in working the land and their constant struggle for survival interfered with the children's ability to experience a traditional, formal education. For adults, school was first seen as fundamental for life success, but over time, acquiring a piece of land through agrarian reform came to be named as the "salvation" for their children's future because school did not fulfill its function of "teaching how to read and write."

Given the highlighted problems, it is essential to recognize the lack of participation of all stakeholders¹¹ in school decisions. Just as in urban environments, rural schools should propose the same deconstruction of the utilitarian view of school and of life. This would require a change in social relations, grounded in individual organization. As a consequence, it would be necessary to value students' lives within their rural environment, to rethink the complete adoption of the urban child's model and adopt methodologies that factor in students' rhythms and potential (not their disabilities).

Another key point is the difference between the objectives of the educational social proposals¹² idealized by the movements and the settlers' expectations once having moved to the settlements. We note that families' efforts to acquire land were not driven by the objectives of the leaders of the landless movements but by their basic needs such as income, modernization,

¹¹ Families, community, children, social movements, and city government.

¹² These proposals were related to the struggle of the popular classes that put into question capitalist values and the hierarchical division between physical and intellectual work.

greater financial equity and the acquisition of assets. We can affirm the same about their expectations for their children's education. Supported by Luria (1990), we found that this contradiction resulted from the change in their status to people *com-terra*,¹³ with all of the new goals and possibilities that accompanied that rise in social class, which created its own problems and behaviors that altered their sense of reality.

We emphasize that all of this discussion is not intended to blame the educators for the poor quality of education found in rural settlements. Although some of their practices need methodological evaluation, we cannot forget that they were also members of the settlement concerned with their survival, whose performance was linked to their quality of life on the settlement. At all stages of the study, we lived among education professionals with responsible attitudes who were conscious of their students' difficulties and peculiarities. This finding, however, does not minimize the importance of reflection on the inadequacies of rural education.

The PANA school – just as it would be with any urban school – promoted a sense of exclusion by its inability to teach the students to be literate, by hindering their acquisition of knowledge, by providing a special education classroom whose sole goal was the socialization of the students and by only “preparing” the preschool students for literacy. With this set-up, both the teachers and students were harmed. Teachers did not gain a sense of fulfillment from their work and students were deprived of essential knowledge.

At present, the policies regarding settlement schools do not address the future of *com-terra* children, making it difficult for them to determine whether or not to stay in the “promised land.” For that reason and for their low levels of education, the students had great difficulty becoming a part of

¹³ “Com-terra” means “with land,” and is thus the opposite status of the “sem-terra,” or those “without land.”

the urban labor market. They felt discriminated against and "condemned" by their "instructional incompetence." Consequently, they went in search of private universities to further their education.¹⁴ We must note that the quest for access to a piece of land should be one of many options for young people and never the only option in the event that their school – and therefore their education – is inadequate.

When analyzing the rural education situation, it is also essential to uncover social differences between the country and the city. The *com-terra* child needs to recognize herself as a historical category to be able to identify her rural setting. Rural education should discuss the conflicts of the local reality, allowing students to gradually acquire strength and courage to fight against their reality, as Freire affirms (1980). If this is not accomplished, we run the risk that they end up trapped in an unsustainable situation that provides them with no opportunities for work and economic survival. Fixing this situation will not be easy. It requires a community (re)organization, respect for others' opinions, and the presence of dialogue, among other factors.

6. Reflections for rethinking the purpose of rural and urban schools

Our research shows that education in the PANA settlement was permeated by aspects (general and specific) that suggested its uniqueness within the educational context of *Mato Grosso do Sul*.

Discussing the general aspects, we see that the same look and the same actions that drive an urban school should permeate the educational actions inside the schools of the country. In both areas, there are problems,

¹⁴ In Brazil, unlike in other countries, the poorest students complete their K-12 education in public schools and their higher education in private universities. On the other hand, the most privileged students attend private K-12 schools and then complete college at public universities.

ideologies, a lack of resources and children with specific characteristics. In both environments, educators need to master the skills necessary to promote access to systematic knowledge and they should be provided with information about the class struggle in Brazil. With their proper specifications, the teachers of the city or of the countryside should consider that their students are capable of producing culture and that they deserve an assessment about the content of the ideology and the methodology in which they will be involved.

Accordingly, the schools need to rethink their positions regarding the "teaching of letters and numbers": the emphasis on copying and symbolism, the sparing use of the integration of the themes of linear organization of the *curriculum* and the disregard for the teacher's ability to adjust the content based on the students' needs. Also, literacy content and exercises should be linked to their daily lives, which has, according to Vygotsky's theory, important implications for education. It is also important to lead students to establish relationships between concepts that contemplate the acquisition of different ways of perceiving reality and expansion of ideas they have about the world (MIGUEL, 2003).

We believe that the two spaces must find ways to consolidate their work into a concept of literacy as a process, favoring exploration of other educational settings (FARIA, 1999), since "(...) teaching must be organized so that reading and writing are necessary (...)" (VYGOTSKY, 2000, p. 155). Based on Vygotsky (2003), we realize that the development process of writing requires the learner to be able to think in the abstract because it is speech without an interlocutor, which forces the learner "(...) to create a situation, or to represent it for us. This requires a departure from the real situation" (ibid. p. 124). Furthermore, the process of literacy must be preceded by the possibility of play and drawing, which permit iconographic registry.

Independent of where they are located, all educational institutions must build their educational project and decide on what foundation they will build their project. Critical thinking must be a central component of the curriculum of any school (in other words, the school should provide an education centered around problem-solving). This type of academic environment will propitiate reflection regarding the reality of insertion, with the objective of drawing closer to humanity. This demand requires that schools carry out their purpose of imparting knowledge in an effective manner.

Complementary to the overall vision of education, (VIGOSTKI, 1998), we note that the emphasis on literacy instruction should coincide with students' abilities since all children do not learn in the same way. It is essential to consider that they read the world and learn in a variety of instances, from experiences shared with others - internalizing concepts, values, and feelings through the mediation of tools, symbols and language in a real way, not in the way it is happening now.

This reasoning demands quality literacy instruction, which will require the leadership of an experienced teacher who bonds with his students and encourages the exchange of different cultures, ideas and values (VIGOSTKI, 2003). In this respect, the action on the zone of proximal development will focus on redefining the practice of imitation and play, so little spoken in the first series, on behalf of the need to teach the written code. Such action will transform the children's spontaneous concepts through actions meaningful to them.

Concluding the discussion about what all schools should have in common, we will now focus the discussion on the particular aspects of rural schools.

One of the issues to be considered is the close relationship between rural and urban worlds: many settlers were originally from the city and were involved in the marketing of commercial products to other settlers; in the

city, purchases, financing and policy decisions are made; the job market is active; people attend to their medical appointments; and many pursue higher education. Therefore, fighting persists ON THE land and does not remove the settlers from the urban area. Rather, it is a reality that, if neglected further, will increase the insecurity of their social rights.

Moreover, although the policy of rooting people in the country includes a plan for eased migration from city to country (MARTINS, 2005), currently, this plan is directed toward families who are doomed to misery and poverty in large cities. Effort must be made to synchronize education, including literacy instruction, between urban and rural schools.

Developing a *curriculum* for rural education requires the redemption of special structures present in rural schools and also demands the community's organized participation, allowing the construction of autonomous knowledge practices, avoiding the reproduction of domination through ideological transposition (FREIRE; NOGUEIRA, 1993). Therefore, we point out as a necessity:

- Consider the lessons learned by the subjects before and after the settlement. Recognize that if the children were important partners in the struggle for land, after this achievement they are configured as key partners in the struggle to STAY in family plots. This means that children and youth have a history and habits that have reconstructed and differentiated their cultural specificities, but make them no less important. Once settled, they continue learning: learning experienced from living on the land promotes changes in their intellectual and motor operations. They have a rich view of the world that should be expanded through school.
- Consider that if rural school content can embrace the teaching of agricultural techniques, students should also have the right to appropriate the knowledge necessary to enable them to

access higher education, if that is their goal. Literacy is the key driver to support this need, since writing is an essential life skill, as recommended by cultural-historical psychology.

- Keep in mind that the fight against exclusion covers the delivery of quality education as a right for all citizens. Therefore, in the same way that it is insufficient and exclusionary for a family to own a piece of land through agrarian reform policies without being guaranteed the means necessary to live on the land with dignity, there is no reason for a child to stay in a classroom if he does not understand what is being taught. This situation bloats government program statistics and conceals a false sense of social inclusion.

We emphasize that despite the students' recurring complaints of being "very tired" at school and that learning the alphabet was "complicated," the students liked attending school. We saw this satisfaction through the affection they displayed towards their teachers, their laughter and play, their paintings, when they read stories and when they participated in outdoor activities such as physical education classes. Finally, they were content when they were not "writing or copying" nonsense, after all "copying and writing are bad" (Diogo). The reasons for this contradiction were explained by their living conditions and organization of the (school) institution.

Based on these observations, the settlement school (and all others) needs to extrapolate these moments of pleasure for triggering moments of learning with pleasure, from the stage of literacy instruction. This should be supported so that teachers can plan strategies that trigger the development of higher psychological functions of children. It is for the teacher, in the act of teaching, to extrapolate the positive moments of contact between teacher and students to accomplish the activity of teaching, a fundamental

implication for overcoming the historical constraints of *com-terra* childhoods.

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