

Rural Education and teacher professionalization challenges in Northwestern Rio de Janeiro State

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ABSTRACT. The aim of the present article is to analyze Basic Education teachers' professionalization in three rural schools in Santo Antônio de Pádua County, –Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil. The adopted methodology followed the participatory observation, which allowed experiences lived in the investigated schools from 2015 to 2019 to raise data diversity. Most of all research results have shown abandonment by the public authorities regarding schools' infrastructure, teachers' initial and continuing training, as well as lack of both political-pedagogical projects and teaching/learning practices based on the principles set for Rural Education and the Pedagogy of Alternation. All these missing elements have impact on teaching autonomy and lead to the degradation in the identity and geography of communities that have attended and still attend to these schools.

Keywords: rural education, teacher professionalization, pedagogy of alternation.

Educação do Campo e os desafios da profissionalização docente no Noroeste Fluminense – Rio de Janeiro

RESUMO. O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar a profissionalização de docentes da Educação Básica em três escolas do campo, localizadas no município de Santo Antônio de Pádua – RJ. Metodologicamente, adotamos a observação-participante, por meio da qual as vivências nas escolas pesquisadas, durante o período de 2015 a 2019, suscitaram uma diversidade de dados. Enquanto resultados mais significativos, a pesquisa evidencia o abandono, por parte do poder público, no tocante à infraestrutura das escolas, à formação inicial e continuada de docentes; bem como, à falta de projetos políticos-pedagógicos e de práticas de ensino e aprendizagem pautadas nos princípios da Educação do Campo e da Pedagogia da Alternância. Todas essas ausências geram impactos na autonomia docente e na desterritorialização – identitária e geográfica – das comunidades que frequentavam/frequentam essas escolas.

Palavras-chave: educação do campo, profissionalização docente, pedagogia da alternância.

Educación Rural y los desafíos de la profesionalización docente en el Noroeste Fluminense – Rio de Janeiro

RESUMEN. El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la profesionalización de los profesores de Educación Básica en tres escuelas rurales, ubicadas en el municipio de Santo Antônio de Pádua – Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. Metodológicamente, adoptamos la observación participante, por medio de las cuales las experiencias en las escuelas encuestadas, durante el período de 2015 a 2019, posibilitaron el acceso a una diversidad de datos. Como resultados más significativos, la investigación destaca el abandono, por parte de los poderes públicos, en cuanto a la infraestructura de las escuelas, la formación inicial y continua de los docentes; así como la carencia de proyectos político-pedagógicos y de prácticas de enseñanza y aprendizaje basados en los principios de la Educación Rural y de la Pedagogía de la Alternancia. Todas estas ausencias generan impactos en la autonomía docente y en la desterritorialización – identitaria y geográfica – de las comunidades que asistieron/asisten a estas escuelas.

Palabras clave: educación rural, profesionalización docente, pedagogía de la alternancia.

Between Pedagogical Ruralism and Rural Education: disputes in question

The symbolic and physical struggles set for land in Latin America, which are the inheritance from colonialism, are marked by inequalities and social exclusion. The country side in Brazil is a multidimensional territory surrounded by dilemma and challenges concerning the historical discussion about public policies focused on rural populations. This discussion, despite the significant advancements in legal frameworks, still follows a path of abandonment towards rural populations. In order to oppose such reality, rural populations have been getting politically organized into collectives and social movements since the 1960s to report the silence and negligence by governmental bureaus (Ribeiro, 2013). Rural populations have been claiming for an education focused on their own social interests and social-historical demands over the organization of these collectives, which, in their turn, aim the development of rural communities, but from perspectives other than the logics adopted by the capital.

Rural peoples use their ethnic-racial and identity diversity to materialize the sense that “the paradigm of the Rural Education rose from the struggle for land and for the agrarian reform ... this fight creates and recreates the peasantry yet in formation in Brazil” (Fernandes & Molina, 2004, p. 39). According to the ideological differentiation process, it is essential highlighting that the landholding structure in place in Brazil allows public policies focused on education aimed at the rural context to be guided by the hegemonic logics mainly contributing to “uproot” rural peoples from their territories. The education proposition thought by the governmental spheres to rural populations remained and are still bond to the prejudice concept, since it does not take into account knowledge resulting from labor, mainly from farmers’ work (Ribeiro, 2013). For a long time, one could witness, and still does, the pedagogical perspective of Countryside Education, whose political aim emerges as the attempt to integrate rural populations to the capitalism-development progress (Arroyo, 2012 & Caldart, 2012).

From the capitalist developmental perspective, “the traditional rural paradigm chooses, selects, what is interesting as economic and cultural model, by favoring logical operations to produce a given reality that validates its own choices and that makes them universal” (Fernandes & Molina, 2004, p. 39). Different from the proposition of the Rural Education Policy, the Countryside Education is conceived from the pragmatic and utilitarian perspective, which is appropriate to the hegemonic logics and models of economic development, whose

bases are substantiated by the interests of the dominating classes (Azevedo, 2007). Accordingly, the Countryside Education based on these concepts ignores the knowledge of rural populations, which are acquired through the work with earth, turns these individuals into aliens of their own work and territory. These concepts gained significant political strength in the 1930s and 40s, and were used to point out a line of thinking known as “pedagogical ruralism” (Arroyo, 2012).

The pedagogical ruralism aimed at favoring the migratory movement of the rural population to urban centers – rural exodus. Thus, it helped the “sense of man’s fixation to the field to romantically highlight an education aimed at the country’s ‘vocation’, which was understood as agrarian” (Antonio & Lucini, 2007, p. 179). Therefore, the pedagogical ruralism, as formation movement, planned propositions for the school education of rural populations (Antunes-Rocha, 2011). Moreover, it has set a strong position towards education for populations living in the countryside. Given such a phenomenon, one finds two essential differences between these two education models; they are made real within the list of divergent interests and in their historical subjects; in other words, the Countryside Rural Education and the Rural Education. In light of the foregoing, we must point out that “the Rural Education has been created for the rural population, so that the paradigms can protect different territories” (Fernandes & Molina, 2004, p. 32).

Besides the herein listed differences, the Rural Education introduces an education proposition that focuses the social and historical process applied to individuals living in the countryside (Caldart, 2012). Thus, its aim is to break up with the concept of Countryside Education that remains available for rural peoples in several Brazilian territories (Andrade et al., 2019). Therefore, thinking about the Rural Education implies analyzing the multiple questions still observed in the peasant territory. In other words, it demands thinking the “countryside and its people, its way of life, labor organization and geographic space, its political organization and cultural identities, festivities and conflicts” (Fernandes & Molina, 2004, p. 38). Understanding the multiple dimensions of the Brazilian rural territories and territoriality allows identifying the main features of rural populations in order to drive their public policies to, consequently, fulfill their specificities (Bavaresco & Rauber, 2014). About this topic, Caldart (2012, p. 261) emphasizes that:

Although the Rural Education remains in the limit spaces of struggles for public policies, its constitutive relationships structurally bonds it to the movement of contradiction at the agrarian issue scope, to projects linked to agriculture or to rural production, to the

technological matrix, to labor organization in the countryside and in the city... Disputes get stronger or get even more exposed when they enter the political debates, since they get to the field of the aims and concepts of education in the countryside, in society and in mankind.

The proposition of an education aimed at rural peoples rises from claims by individuals and collectives. Thus, when we talk about Rural Education it is inevitable not to think of social struggles, of labor leader characters and of subjects of pedagogical actions (Machado, 2017). Therefore, Rural Social Movements, by claiming for an education focused on their needs and interests, embody the main role of formulating public policies “as political authors-subjects of policies” (Arroyo, 2012, p. 360). It happens because the Rural Education emerges “as social struggle for farmers’ access to the rural workers to education (rather than to any education), which is developed by themselves, not only in their behalf. The Rural Education is not *for*, but actually, *from* peasants” (Caldart, 2012, p. 261). This key part ends up stressing the public spheres, such as the Ministry of Education and other bureaus focused on formulating and analyzing the State policies, when it comes to the creation of policies to acknowledge social movements (Arroyo, 2012).

The construction of struggles by social movements for the right to education led to Decree n. 7352, from November 4, 2010, among some of the most relevant ones. This document not only enacted the Rural Education Policy, but also led to the claim for the elaboration of the National Program of Rural Education (Pronacampo). Moreover, this decree was the very basis for the implementation, in 2012, of the Program to Support Higher Education in Rural Education (Procampo) (Andrade et al., 2019). The Procampo agenda defined that teachers’ formation would be mediated by a formative matrix based on some specificities, in order to make it different from the other teachers’ formation courses. Among these specificities we highlight the differentiated formation spaces/times; i.e., *University Time* (UT) and *Community Time* (CT), as pointed out by Molina and Hage (2015, p. 137):

Discipline matrix organization in this major degree foresees face-to-face stages (corresponding to the semester in regular courses) offered under alternating regime between School Time and Community Time, given the intrinsic articulation between education and the specific reality of rural populations.

The articulation of these spaces/times represent the attempt to address multiple formation possibilities; among them, one finds the epistemic approximation between rural and academic knowledge. Besides the epistemological issue, it is important emphasizing the

symbolic and political value of having rural populations attending college. Such presence is materialized in the construction of formation programs to respond to particularities and singularities deriving from the historical process that has excluded the access to education to the working class in the countryside and to traditional peoples (Molina & Freitas, 2011). It is so, because the Brazilian structural organization meets the hegemonic interests that have historically marginalized rural populations by posing on them a rural education that denies them the right to their own culture, to their work and bond to the land (Ribeiro, 2013). Therefore, the physical presence of these individuals in academic spaces – not just as research subjects – would challenge the Brazilian social structure.

Research conceptual and methodological arrangements

From other aspects, the challenge of thinking rural educators' professionalization at Basic Education scope, based on experience, means making it possible developing resistance strategies within the brutal scenario of closing rural schools and of denying the right to education (Andrade & Rodrigues, 2020). Accordingly, it is essential discussing rural educators' formation and, consequently, the impact of such a formation on the actions taken by teachers who understand the complexity of the agrarian issue in Brazil. In light of the foregoing, the pedagogical proposition of the Rural Education highlights that “the very root of everything is the human being within its humanization process” (Arroyo, 2012, p. 359). Thus, this proposition makes it possible for teachers to develop their reflection skills – as emphasized by Oliveira (2016) – to apply them to the main social, economic and environmental issues affecting society; in other words, it makes available knowledge as context analysis instrument to make the pedagogical practice effective.

Understanding the national scenario linked to Countryside Education and Rural Education models makes us willing to enter the particularities and local features of territories where one sees the construction of the Rural Education. From this perspective, the aim of the present study is to discuss the professionalization process experienced by Basic Education rural teachers, and its influence on the construction of humanizing pedagogical practices capable of constructing decolonial and counter-hegemonic pedagogical perspectives. The development of such a research derived from the will to assess the still little explored reality of the Brazilian field education; i.e., the conditions for teachers' employability and formation in three rural schools. These schools are located in Santo Antônio de Pádua County, Rio de

Janeiro State, Brazil, within a territory encompassing a significant population that lives in the countryside – approximately 10% of the total population –, a fact that demands specific educational public policies (IBGE, 2010)¹.

Back in 2015, Santo Antônio de Pádua City was granted with the implementation of the Interdisciplinary Course in Rural Education at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). From that time, onwards, this course has been articulating and developing approximation processes aimed at rural schools in the region; therefore, it has been setting dialogues to reinforce the struggle for Rural Education in the city and region. These processes have started in the second semester of 2015, based on the elaboration of a map of schools in the country. Subsequently, it aimed visits to the field, which were supervised by the courses' professors; these visits took place in the following schools: *Alice do Amaral Peixoto*, *João Neves Brum* and *Anacleto Eccard Júnior* – these two last schools were closed in 2017. These visits were the very basis for the later development of the current research, which followed the collective formative perspective during the academic trajectory resulting from the course; thus, it comprises the temporal cut from 2015 to 2019.

Research elaboration encompassed a feature of Rural Education courses; i.e., the construction of collective aimed at “producers-researchers [focused on] knowledge about the very formation practices either in the courses, in research, in the country side, in time, in community or in the rural social, political, cultural and pedagogy of its peoples and movements” (Arroyo, 2012, p. 364). Accordingly, the aim of the research is to assess the professionalization process experienced by Basic Education teachers in three schools, in Santo Antônio de Pádua County – *Alice do Amaral Peixoto*, *João Neves Brum* and *Anacleto Eccard Júnior*. Thus, we have adopted the participatory observation methodology; therefore, we focused experiences lived in these schools that have led to data diversity, which were synthesized in a field journal. However, we will also herein recue seven analytical categories that are closely related to Basic Education teachers' formation in the countryside, namely: teachers' employability conditions, initial formation, continuing formation, teachers' autonomy, teaching/learning practices, Pedagogy of Alternation, multi-grade classes.

Participatory observation was herein adopted as data collection method, since it is the proper methodology to apprehend, understand and intervene with several contexts where researcher's displace in (Mónico et al., 2017). Accordingly, we agreed that the participatory observation “is mainly appropriate to exploratory and descriptive studies, as well as to studies

aimed at generating interpretative theories” (Lima, Almeida & Lima, 1999, p. 132). Throughout our experiences in rural schools, observation was the fundamental investigation element and it was translated into an articulating axis between theory and practice. The flexibility of this approach allowed the approximation to the daily routines of the school community and to their representations, and to the historical and sociocultural dimension of its processes (Mónico et al., 2017). Therefore, we engaged in following-up and recording all data related to research aims in a field journal during the conduction of the empirical study. These data were organized and synthesized, and their analyses were carried out based on a bibliographic review linked to the epistemological field of the Rural Education and to Decolonial Studies.

Formation of rural teachers: between absence and insipience in the construction of rural schools

The approval of Operational Guidelines for Basic Education on Rural Schools – CNE/CEB Resolution 1, from April 3, 2002 – was essential to ensure investments in the provision of Rural Education. However, this essential element does not reflect the observed reality, mainly if we look to the insignificant number of formation programs aimed at rural teachers before Decree n. 7.352/2010². Along with other elements, this lack of significance has been showing one of the challenges posed to the institutionalization of pedagogical concepts and Rural Education policies in Brazil. In other words, it highlights the statement that “the specificity of rural teachers is no longer questioned, but ensured” (Arroyo, 2007, p. 164). Nevertheless, after two decades of their approval, these Operational Guidelines, and more than one decade after Decree n. 7.352/2010, governmental spheres still face a hard time materializing the Rural Education, to the detriment of the concept of Countryside Education. These difficulties will be introduced below.

Teachers’ formation and their employability conditions in the three assessed schools

Based on the combat of educational disadvantages listed in the basic document of Procampe, Molina and Antunes-Rocha (2014, p. 226) restate that “the needs observed in rural schools’ demand professionals with quite broadened and wide formation, who are capable of understanding a whole series of educational and deforming dimensions found in the stressing reality experienced in the countryside nowadays”. That said, teachers who work with rural

populations must have a formation that makes them skilled enough to understand the severity and complexity of capital accumulation in the countryside, by understanding that these processes interfere with the reality of the rural territory (Molina & Antunes-Rocha, 2014). Accordingly, based on these references, we have defined the following categories as the main ones for the herein conducted analysis: initial and continuing formation, the employability conditions of teachers working in the three rural schools in Santo Antônio de Pádua City. This information is organized in Chart 1.

Chart 1 -Teachers' formation and professionalization.

Schools	Number of teachers	Statutory labor regime	Graduation formation	Graduation course's name	Continuing formation in Rural Education
Alice do Amaral Peixoto School	4 teachers	X	✓	Pedagogy	X
		X	✓	Pedagogy	X
		X	✓	Computer Studies	X
		X	X	-----	X
João Neves Brum School	3 teachers	X	✓	Pedagogy	X
		X	✓	Pedagogy	X
		X	✓	Pedagogy	X
Anacleto Eccard Júnior School	1 teachers	X	✓	Pedagogy	X

Source: Elaborated by the authors. Research data (from 2015 to 2019).

Data presented in Chart 1 highlight that most teachers who work in these three assessed rural schools – all of them belonged to the female sex – have college degree. This evidence is an antagonistic diagnostic in comparison to the national context, since most teachers working in rural areas in Brazil do not have a higher education degree³. However, none of these professionals have attended any sort of initial and/or continuing formation program, mainly when it comes to Rural Education. We understand that, given the specificity of the political project proposed for Rural Education, the major in Pedagogy – the course attended by 6 of the 8 teachers who work in these three schools – is not enough to fulfill the demands of the school communities. Actually, it is the opposite; there are cases in which it makes the understanding about the importance of the Pedagogy of Alternation for the dynamics of rural schools harder, since many pedagogy students graduate without attending any discipline about Rural

Education over their formation period. Therefore, it does not regard commitment, but technical formation, something that was added to the discipline matrix of the Pedagogy Course at Faetec³; this institution formed most of these teachers.

Based on the literature, rural schools need “committed educators, who have theoretical and practical conditions to deconstruct the practices and ideas that forged the rural medium and school” (Molina & Antunes-Rocha, 2014, p. 226). Moreover, the normative frameworks of Rural Education point towards the essentiality of educators working in rural contexts to know the specificities of the Rural Education; therefore, they must be able to add the theoretical and methodological elements of the Pedagogy of Alternation to school routines (Brasil, 2010). The records of dialogues with teachers in these three assessed rural schools point out two main issues related to professionalization, namely: *a)* professionals only have little knowledge about the political and pedagogical proposition of the Rural Education; *b)* these teachers state that they do not identify themselves as country side educators. In other words, these teachers did not have an approximation relationship with the rural setting, neither with social movements.

Research information has made us reason about the likely perspectives that would give us a clear explanation for the lack of bonds between these educators – about the life and work in the countryside - and the populations they work with. The following two hypotheses were taken into consideration as possible perspectives: *a)* high teachers’ turnover in rural schools within the assessed context; *b)* lack of academic formation in Rural Education and of political participation in social movements. With respect to the first hypothesis, we have pointed out the reflexes of teachers’ employment bonds based on outsourcing contracts; it means that they only teach in the assessed schools for a pre-determined period-of-time. In other words, they are not statutory teachers; therefore, they do not enjoy effectiveness in their positions. Thus, teachers’ high turnover rates in these schools can be the element making the bonds with the countryside, with the community and with the proposition to root these communities in their lands harder to be accomplished.

The high turnover rates in the assessed schools reinforced the thesis by Ribeiro (2013, p. 124), who highlights that “as these teachers get to broaden their formation, they claim for transference to schools in urban zones; therefore, it keeps the precariousness of teaching provided by rural schools”. With respect to this topic, results in the study by Santos (2019) make it clear that most of the time teachers use improvised strategies due to lack of specific

formation for working in the countryside; these strategies end up being the only way for them to work with their students. This author also adds that these improvisations “get wider and compromise the practices that, oftentimes, do not have consistent theoretical-methodological references focused on the Rural Education reality” (Santos, 2019, p. 21).

As for the second hypothesis, and based on data recorded in the field journal, regardless of the high turnover rates, teachers in these schools do not have specific and/or continuing formation in Rural Education, neither have bonds to social movements. This lack of involvement and information have significant impact on these teachers’ professionalization policies, so that they do not join part of the ideas building the pedagogical proposition and policies of the Rural Education. Research information suggest that we must take into consideration that the Rural Education consists of starting from claims and struggles by social movements; therefore, teachers in the countryside have to get a broader understanding of their political responsibility. In other words, these professionals must have class awareness, since they also exert the function of defending differentiated education rights for peasant populations. According to Molina and Freitas (2011, p. 28):

It is essential forming educators within the very rural communities; besides knowing and valuing them, they also must be capable of understanding the social reproduction processes experienced by countryside individuals and put themselves in rural communities during their struggle and resistance processes focused on their permanence in the land.

Social movements in the countryside articulate strategies to overcome the presence of educators who do not have bonds to the countryside based on their resistance and struggle processes for land. These strategies are substantiated by claims for continuous investments in public policies for rural teachers’ initial and continuing formation (Caldart, 2012). Thus, Rural Education Major Degrees, also known as LEDOCs, have been helping the teachers’ formation policies, so that “one of the main features of this major degree lies on the fact that its starts from the full view of social relationships those aiming to teach are inserted in” (Molina, 2017, p. 602). Accordingly, it is important highlighting the relevance of rural teachers’ formation in order to change the reality they work in; as well as to broaden the perspectives associated with the struggle for land. Results recorded by Oliveira and Santos (2018, p. 122) corroborate this idea when they state that “teachers must learn to reason and think about their pedagogical practices during their formation process in order to make students acquire knowledge, and a critical and autonomous conscience”.

Still, about the formation policies, Molina (2017) points out that LEDOCs' contributions also reflect on the post-graduation scope, since they echo on different orders. Therefore, it is known that the major degree in Rural Education has emerged as essential to the transformation process when it comes to teachers' formation and professionalization principles. Although the reality in the three herein assessed schools did not show teachers with major degree in Rural Education, the presence of students in the graduation course in these schools, as well as research potentiated by Community Time – as highlighted by Neves and collaborators (2019), and Andrade and Neves (2021) –, provide new elements to the political dynamics of Santo Antônio de Pádua City. These dynamics play key part “in the materialization of formation process and in the consolidation of a given rural teacher profile, which gets consolidated as its pedagogical action and political interventions in the very struggles of peasants” (Molina & Antunes-Rocha, 2014, p. 233).

Teaching and learning in the assessed schools: Countryside Education approaches as colonial features

The construction of discipline matrix organization and of teaching/learning practices in compliance with the specificities and interests of the peasant population emerges as recurrent agenda within the prospection of the Rural Education Policy. With respect to the struggle for rights and, therefore, for the right to education, it is essential pointing out the relevance of rural teachers' formation and action, which must be built from experiences lived by the communities. This understanding will allow anticipating communities due to subtleness operating in political interests in public policies, mainly in those focused on countryside emptying. In order to stop such emptying, Decree n. 7.352, from November 4, 2010, provided on the Rural Policy and on the National Program for Education in the Agrarian Reform – PRONERA – in its art. 2, where it introduces some of the basic principles of Rural Education:

I – respect to diversity in the country at its social, cultural, environmental, political, economic, gender, generational, race and ethnic aspects;

II – incentive to the formulation of political-pedagogical projects specific to rural schools by encouraging the development of school facilities as public spaces for the investigation and articulation of experiences and studies focused on economically fair and environmentally sustainable social development linked to the labor world;

III – development of education professionals' formation policies focused on the understanding of rural schools' specificities by taking into consideration the concrete conditions for the social production and reproduction of life in the countryside;

IV – valuing the identity of the rural school based on pedagogical projects substantiated by proper discipline matrix contents and methodologies for the real needs of rural students, as

well as flexibility in schools' organization, including school calendar adjustment to the agricultural cycles and to the climatic conditions;
 V – social control of school education quality based on effective community participation and on countryside social movements.

By taking into account the previously cited references and the experience acquired from the time spent in the three rural schools, we aimed at analyzing how schools *Alice do Amaral Peixoto*, *João Neves Brum* and *Anacleto Eccard Júnior* address the basic principles driving the Rural Education. In order to do so, we have set four analysis categories, namely: *a*) teachers' autonomy towards contents; *b*) educational practices; *c*) Pedagogy of the Alternation and *d*) multi-grade classes. The aim of this analysis was to enter some fundamental questions featuring the imposition of Countryside Education in rural schools; in other words, the distancing of the official discourse from the concrete practice experienced in each community. Thus, it aimed at confronting the Euro-centered and Urban-centered concepts that tend to impose a unified representation of school as it acts to promote rural exodus. This exodus is made feasible by State's omission and negligence, which denies the possibility of countryside populations permanence in their lands.

Chart 2 - Elements featuring the teaching/learning practices.

Observed aspects Schools	Teachers' autonomy – didactic materials	Teaching/learning practices	Presence of the alternation regime	Multi-grade classes
Alice do Amaral Peixoto Schools	X	X	X	✓
João Neves Brum Schools	X	X	X	✓
Anacleto Eccard Júnior Schools	X	X	X	✓

Source: Elaborated by the authors. Research data (from 2015 to 2019).

In order to discuss the first aspect, it is important to have in mind our experiences in the three assessed schools, we have observed that all these schools mainly attend countryside students and are geographically located in rural areas; i.e., they gather requirements for the acknowledgement of their identity as rural schools (Brasil, 2010). However, they did not offer, or still do not offer, a teaching process focused on the specificities of the countryside population and on their territoriality. Moreover, they were not acknowledged by the municipal governmental agencies as rural schools. Thus, Decree n. 7.532/2010, in its Art. 2, item IV,

highlights that the principles of the Rural Education are the “valorization of the rural school’s identity based on pedagogical projects encompassing discipline matrix contents and methodologies adjusted to students’ real needs ... including the adjustment to agricultural cycle and to climatic conditions” (Brasil, 2020).

Research data point out that the teaching processes available in the three assessed schools are not different from the discipline matrix adopted in urban schools; therefore, they do not fulfill the principles provided at legislation scope. In any case, as justification for such amplification of the pedagogical ruralism concepts, teachers and schools’ management report that basic education evaluations applied to students, carried out by the Federal Government, classify students’ performance based on a pre-set urban logic. In other words, contents in the tests do not comprise the differentiated principles provided on, and established in, legal instruments substantiating the Rural Education (Brasil, 2010; 2020). These data have allowed us to understand that two contradictions had to be inserted in the very core of our analysis: *a)* the State that ensures the effectiveness of the Rural Education through legal instruments such as Bills and Decrees do not acknowledge its Basic Education evaluation mechanisms; *b)* although the Rural Education is described in normative frameworks since 2002, the three herein assessed schools do not have political-pedagogical projects elaborated based on the principles of it.

The two clarified contradictions are amplified when we identify that the didactic materials, such as books, were, and still are, the same used in urban-zone schools. This finding shows the strategies to reduce the autonomy and the regulation of teachers’ works, as reported by Molina and Hage (2015, p. 131), which was claimed by the “use of didactic materials that are ready to be used by the teachers, and by [the existence] of supervisors who inspect their application”. We understand that the teachers’ work regulation represents serious epistemological and psychological consequences to teachers and students when it comes to representativeness, to self-acknowledgement, identity, territorialization and professionalization. As for professionalization and State negligence with rural populations, multi-grade classes emerge as a reality where “most rural schools from 1st to 4th grade belong to the multi-grade or single-teacher type; some teachers in these schools have formation to work with elementary school, and some, with high school” (Ribeiro, 2013, p. 124).

The national reality of multi-grade or single-teacher classrooms somehow reflects on rural schools in Santo Antônio de Pádua. All the three assessed schools worked, and still

work, with multi-grade classes, which are justified by the argument that the number of students is very small. However, multi-grade classes are the strategy adopted by the municipal public power to mitigate costs with schools, a fact that contributes to non-effectiveness of the Pedagogy of Alternation. Accordingly, research data have shown that – based on teachers’ speech – working with this class types is difficult, because you have to prepare different class plans to the same class. This speech is related to results recorded by Hage and Barros (2010), who have indicated that anguish related to the organization of the pedagogical work in multi-grade classrooms due to the teachers’ hard time organizing the pedagogical process, because they work with the sense of gathering several grades at the same time. Thus, teachers need to

Elaborate both teaching plans and evaluation strategies for the differentiated learning of all grades they work with. As outcome, teachers feel distressed and anxious to perform their work the best way possible and, at the same time, they feel lost and need support to organize the school schedule, due to a necessary situation that can involve up to seven grades, altogether (Hage & Barros, 2010, p. 354).

Multi-grade classes experienced in the three assessed schools emerge as a challenge to public policies focused on the countryside in the region. These classes, based on research data, were/are constantly criticized by the teachers, because they are associated with the representation of something negative. Therefore, it implies the construction of teachers’ professionalization, mainly when it comes to teachers’ bond to the countryside identity. Besides these issues, based on the literature, common sense establishes several comparisons between multi-grade classes and serial classes in the city, a fact that translates the will of these schools to become serial; i.e., the only alternative for them to develop a high-quality teaching-learning process (Hage & Barros, 2010). The multi-grade issue, in its turn, based on the National Institute on Educational Studies and Research (Hage & Barros, 2010), lies

On lack of specific qualification for the involved professionals, on lack of adequate pedagogical material and, consequently, on lack of basic infrastructure – human material and resources – to favor the teaching activity and to ensure the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process. Investments in these aspects could turn multi-grade classes into a good alternative to rural areas, since it would meet the will of population for having a school close to the students’ houses, without losing the quality of the provided teaching, mainly when it comes to the early years of elementary school (INEP, 2007, p. 19).

However, as explained in the document elaborated by INEP, if there is infrastructure, the necessary resources, and the necessary teachers’ initial and continuing formation in Rural Education, multi-grade classes could also be seen as beneficial. Previous research has pointed

out that the multi-grade system, as a whole, can favor the socialization environment during the teaching/learning process; in other words, age and grade differences could make it possible students' knowledge exchange, a fact that would likely potentiate the learning process (Teruya et al., 2013). Accordingly, in order to make sure about students effective learning, multi-grade classes demand full dedication and greater commitment to teachers' role. Despite all challenges concerning the multi-grade system, it can become something positive whenever there is infrastructure followed by a pedagogical proposition and by professionals with Rural Education qualification.

With respect to the category of teaching/learning practical analysis, the herein collected data have shown the very profile of Countryside Education; therefore, the colonial principles of these practices, which are substantiated by the urban paradigm. In order to detail the elements composing this profile, we have to go back to the Decolonial Thinking, mainly to the concept introduced by Walter Mignolo about coloniality and decoloniality, which name a complex set of power relationships. According to Mignolo (2017, p. 13), coloniality emerges as “a ‘power matrix or colonial standard’, that is a complex of relationships that hide themselves behind the rhetoric of modernity (the report of salvation, progress and happiness) that justifies violence by coloniality”. In order to face such a violence, this author highlights that “decoloniality” is the necessary response either to fallacies and fictions observed in the promises of progress and development encompassed by modernity, such as coloniality’s violence” (Mignolo, 2017, p. 13).

The aforementioned and described concepts are essential to pinpoint coloniality’s different perspectives of *power*, *knowledge* and *being*, as well as its impact on the lives of political minorities and on nature. These concepts are important to help us understand and analyze the subordination and exclusion process applied to the ways of being, thinking and acknowledging the particularities of populations living in the countryside. According to Quijano (2005, p. 115), the coloniality logic is based on “a specific rationality or knowledge perspective that became globally hegemonic by colonizing and overcoming all other previous or different ones, and their respective concrete knowledge”. Thus, it is clear that either the teaching/learning practices or the evaluations set by the federal government in the assessed rural schools start from Eurocentric epistemic logics, and from the assumption of embodying marginalized representations and cultures that only reinforce the colonial stereotypes and processes, mainly those related to racialization” (Oliveira & Candau, 2010).

Based on research data, we can relate the knowledge of colonial logics to perpetuate an education model that forces subjects living in the countryside to adjust to educational models based on urban paradigms. More precisely, there is no effective consolidation of an educational policy of Rural Education. The State insists in subordinating the different knowledge observed in rural areas by imposing a minimum discipline matrix and standardized evaluations that deny the way of being and knowing of countryside populations, and their singularities. Oliveira and Candau (2010) point out that the guidelines explicitly formulate political perspectives to acknowledge different political, cultural, social, historical and environmental aspects. However, they also propose “as mandatory, pedagogical contents in teaching systems that, in their turn, are featured as no traditional perspective in the Brazilian education” (Oliveira & Candau, p. 2010, p. 32).

As the outcome of previously mentioned consequences, we must highlight that, when we questioned whether students wanted to remain in the countryside, they often answered, no. Their answers reflected their will to go to the city, because, according to them, the city is “better” than the countryside. When we asked them about their statement, most of them mentioned that such an idea is shared in the school, a fact that put us, once more, before several challenges posed to rural schools. Part of these challenges consists in facing the modernity/coloniality logic, when it comes to deconstruct the concept of countryside as obsolete territory and, consequently, to fight for these populations’ permanence in their territories. This representation of obsolete place, which derives from the coloniality concept of being, knowing and power, has been questioned in research carried out by Arroyo (2007, p. 158), who emphasized that:

There is an idealization of the city as civilizing space for excellency, of conviviality, sociability and socialization, of expression of political, cultural and educational dynamics. This idealization of the city corresponds to a negative view of the countryside as obsolete place of cultural traditionalism. These images complete each other and inspire public educational and school policies, and inspire most legal texts. The urban paradigm is the inspiration of the right to education.

The Pedagogy of Alternation emerged as alternative possibility to this coloniality concept and to the urbancentered paradigm, since it represents one of the means to break with this education model. However, alternation is not adopted in countryside schools in Santo Antônio de Pádua City as methodological response to teaching, even if it is provided on national education frameworks. According to Decree n. 7.352/2010, art. 7, item II, “the offer

of basic education, mainly in high school and in the last stages of elementary school, and in higher education, based on the principles of the pedagogical alternation methodology” must be followed and ensured by federative entities (Brasil, 2010). We understand that working with Alteration systems would represent the possibility of seeing that teachers and students in the three herein assessed schools could have experienced the resignification of their own realities based on their practices. It is so, because, by exchanging knowledge of life and school environments, there is the possibility of reinforcing identities as subjects and leading characters of a pedagogical practice.

Given the precariousness, the canceling school identities and the emptying of the countryside, it is clear that there is the need of re-signifying the pedagogical practices of the assessed schools to, then, reinforce their bonds to the countryside and to its identity. This reinforcement could be made feasible, as highlighted by Ribeiro (2013, p. 239), through the very nature of the Pedagogy of Alternation method, according to which, “work is the educational principle of an integral human formation that dialectically articulates the productive work to formal teaching”. Therefore, we agree that the Pedagogy of Alternation, as decolonial proposition, criticizes the knowledge that historically occupies a subordination place in formal education programs due to the Western profile and to Eurocentrism; therefore, of its excluding categories.

The pedagogical practice measured by the Pedagogy of Alternation emerges to answer to the historical demands of countryside populations for an education that fulfill their needs and meets their interests (Caldart, 2012). In other words, it rises as a pedagogical proposition that thinks the countryside from the perspective of the peasant class and that seeks to recover “the essential bond between human formation and existence material production, since it conceives the educational intension to head towards new social-relationship standards” (Caldart, 2012, p. 263). Besides, the sense of Alternation is not more than destabilizing all and any form of coloniality through the decolonial movement, which ensures the epistemic emancipation; as well as from other forms of knowledge production (Andrade et al., 2019). Consequently, it “represents the construction and a new epistemological space that includes subordinated and Western knowledge, within a stressing, critical and more egalitarian relationship (Oliveira & Candau, 2010, p. 27).

Conclusions

The present research made it clear that the three assessed rural schools in Santo Antônio de Pádua City, Rio de Janeiro State, Brazil, are not different from the national reality; they are in the very core of strategies to strangle the quality of the Rural Education. These schools were abandoned by the public power; therefore, they show the fragility related to some aspects, such as: *a)* infrastructure; *b)* teachers' initial formation and continuing formation in Rural Education; *c)* pedagogical practices that encompass different realities students and social contexts schools are inserted in. As its main results, the research highlights that almost all teachers acting in these schools have college degree. However, such a datum is irrelevant, since these teachers do not identify themselves as countryside teachers and/or with the countryside reality. This lack of identification can be associated with several aspects, mainly to lack of specific and differentiated formation; with high turnover of teachers hired to work in the herein assessed schools; with lack of bond to the territory and to matters that surround the struggle for the Rural Education; among others. All these missing elements make it hard to develop pedagogical practices that encompass the demands and specificities of countryside populations.

Results have shown that teachers who act in the three assessed schools suffer with lack of formation to work with multi-grade classes; as well as with lack of autonomy in their educational practice. These teachers, by following the guidelines of municipal and national education policies, work based on the discipline matrix and on the content set for Basic Education evaluations. Accordingly, these guidelines corroborate teaching-learning practices substantiated by the colonial logic, which excludes the way of life and knowledge of countryside populations. Besides exclusion, this research points out that among the several barriers to an effective Rural Education as public policy, one finds governmental agendas and interests. Such considerations get strength due to two questions: *a)* Basic Education evaluation systems are elaborated from an urban-centric logic; *b)* political-pedagogical projects of the three schools were/are not elaborated based on the Rural Education principle.

The two clarified matters are associated with other research outcomes; they clarify the negligence of governmental spheres at local and national scope when it comes to make the Rural Education effective in Northwestern Rio de Janeiro State, which is a territory marked by the process to close countryside schools and by the denial of the right to school education. Based on the presented results, it is clear that the Rural Education project as ideological and

political perspectives is compromised by the agendas of extermination policies set by economic forces that determine the dynamics of struggles for land in Brazil. With respect to the games of power focused on land accumulation, the extermination of school education possibilities for countryside populations is part of a larger project. This project aims the disruption of rural schools, lack of teachers' formation and identity, of specific didactic materials, of pedagogical practices supported by the Rural Education and of lack of Pedagogy of Alternation, among others; this process represents the barrier to the reinforcement of an identity forged in the work and in life in rural areas; consequently, to the permanence of these populations in their territory. The lack of this identity affects other aspects that lead to the 'deterritorialization' of countryside populations, be it in the geographic field or in the imaginary field of symbolic representations.

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Article Information

Received on March 03th, 2022
Accepted on February 15th, 2023
Published on March, 15th, 2023

Author Contributions: The author were responsible for the designing, delineating, analyzing and interpreting the data, production of the manuscript, critical revision of the content and approval of the final version published.

Conflict of Interest: None reported.

Article Peer Review

Double review.

Funding

No funding.

How to cite this article

APA

Andrade, F. M. R., Rodrigues, M. P. M., & Gomes, J. S. (2023). Andrade, F. M. R., Rodrigues, M. P. M., & Gomes, J. S. (2023). Rural Education and teacher professionalization challenges in Northwestern Rio de Janeiro State. *Rev. Bras. Educ. Camp.*, 8, e14037. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20873/uft.rbec.e14037>

ABNT

ANDRADE, F. M. R.; RODRIGUES, M. P. M.; GOMES, J. S. Rural Education and teacher professionalization challenges in Northwestern Rio de Janeiro State. *Rev. Bras. Educ. Camp.*, Tocantinópolis, v. 8, e14037, 2023. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20873/uft.rbec.e14037>