

PRONERA in a paradigmatic perspective: The experience of Youth and Adult Education in the countryside

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ABSTRACT. This article consists a re-reading of a study conducted in mid-2006. The goal was to establish relationship between advisory student and advisor professor. We conducted our reflections on Rural Education and Youth and Adult Education circumscribed in the PRONERA - National Program of Education in Agrarian Reform, which for more than 20 years has been developed in several states of Brazil. The Program is based on the Freirean pedagogical political presuppositions and on the accumulation of educational experiences of organized social movements. In this sense, the approach of our research also sought to reflect on the interface with the evaluation of a public policy, inasmuch as it sought to verify its effectiveness as a reference for rural education at the national level and for the strengthening of Brazilian public education.

Keywords: Paradigm, PRONERA, Rural Education, Youth and Adult Education.

O PRONERA numa perspectiva paradigmática: a experiência da Educação de Jovens e Adultos do Campo

RESUMO. O texto que ora apresentamos resulta de uma releitura de um estudo conduzido por nós em meados de 2006, quando numa relação entre orientanda e orientador conduzíamos nossas reflexões acerca da Educação do Campo e da Educação de Jovens e Adultos circunscrita no PRONERA – Programa Nacional de Educação na Reforma Agrária, que há mais de 20 anos vem se desenvolvendo em diversos estados da federação. O Programa está fundamentado nos pressupostos políticos pedagógicos freirianos e no acúmulo de experiências educativas dos movimentos sociais organizados. Nesse sentido, a abordagem de nossa investigação buscou também refletir acerca da interface com a avaliação de uma política pública, na medida em que procurou verificar sua efetividade enquanto uma referência para a educação do campo em âmbito nacional e para o fortalecimento da educação pública brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Educação de Jovens e Adultos, Educação do Campo, PRONERA, Paradigma.

O PRONERA en una perspectiva paradigmática: la experiencia de la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos rurales

RESUMEN: El texto presentado aquí es el resultado de una relectura de un estudio realizado por nosotros a mediados de 2006, cuando en una relación entre asesor y asesor realizamos nuestras reflexiones sobre la educación de campo y la educación de jóvenes y adultos circunscrita en el PRONERA - Programa Nacional La educación en la reforma agraria, que se ha desarrollado durante más de 20 años en varios estados de la federación. El programa se basa en los supuestos políticos pedagógicos de Freire y en la acumulación de experiencias educativas de movimientos sociales organizados. En este sentido, el enfoque de nuestra investigación también buscó reflexionar sobre la interfaz con la evaluación de una política pública, ya que buscaba verificar su efectividad como referencia para la educación de campo a nivel nacional y para el fortalecimiento de la educación pública brasileña.

Palabras clave: Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos, Educación Rural, PRONERA, Paradigma.

First words

The idea of sharing reflections on Rural Education and Youth and Adult Education demanded of us the re-reading of some writings produced in other spaces and times. We have been brought to evidence part of the fruits of our researches, conversations and dialogues established throughout our academic trajectory on the Youth and Adult Rural Education, which constitutes our meeting and departure points. The investigation made possible our theoretical and personal approach and many encounters and dialogues emerged through it.

It is this dialogue that allows the re-reading and reconstruction of this text and it indicates to the reader new horizons of possibilities, not only of the questions related to the theme itself, but also to understand that in front of the logical process experienced, the acquired learnings have essential importance.

We establish among us a network of relationships and complicities. These relationships which took place through the Youth and Adult Rural Education have enabled us to research a common element, the PRONERA – National Program of Education in Agrarian Reform. We focus our attention on two great rich experiences. One occurred in the state of Paraíba and the other in the state of Tocantins,

specifically in the region known as *Bico do Papagaio*.

In the attempt to understand the complexity of a part of the history, we try to focus our attention on what was the mid-2006 object of our research – PRONERA, seeking to understand it from a paradigmatic view, since the emergence of the said Program in the Brazilian educational scenario in the late 1990s brought a new look over the Youth and Adult Education in Brazil.

Fávero (2011) states that “PRONERA is currently one of the broadest education programs in the countryside”, In addition to its literacy programs, it has also offered higher education courses in several locations. Based on that, we consider the program has led to the advancement of a culture of the right of all to quality education. This means that the pedagogical innovations present in this program guide a new way of living and thinking about the educational practices of peasants from their territory.

To think of PRONERA as a *new paradigm of the Rural Education* led us to a rapid foray into literature in order to understand the concept of paradigm. In this exercise, we perceive that this concept took a popular dimension from the works of Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), who, through his work *The Structure of Scientific*

Revolutions (1962), would profoundly change the analyses and conclusions about the nature of science.

In this context, the notion of paradigm proposed by the author refers to structures and/or understandings of the world, that is, a new way of seeing reality. It is a relatively important concept, which allows the understanding not only of science, but of life in society. In this sense, Kuhn (1990, p. 109) states that:

By learning a paradigm, the scientist acquires theory, methods and patterns together, usually in an inextricable mixture (*sic*). Therefore, when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria that determine the legitimacy of both the problems and the proposed solutions.

Thus, with regard to the national debate regarding the proposals on countryside education in Brazil, we see the existence of a mosaic of initiatives that end up revealing a pedagogical territory strongly marked by tensions. A broad perspective of compensatory education policies which do not question socio-territorial inequalities coexists with educational projects aimed to strengthen the social movements of rural workers to transform social relations in the countryside and also rural/urban relations.

The existence of decontextualized projects that tend to uproot countryside

people, opposed to projects that respect the way of life and the culture of the population that lives and works there, is constantly debated. There are those who privilege the formation of labor for the market, in response to the needs of modern agriculture (agribusiness), and who proposes to train social subjects engaged in agricultural processes that imply confronting the model linked to agribusiness.

To the same extent, on the one hand, there are programs and projects with the aim of educating with more quality within the urban school model and, on the other, there are programs and projects recognizing the specificity and respect to the diversity of the countryside. There are also programs that think about education for the countryside and programs that propose to think about education with the subjects of the countryside.

These different conceptions *of/to* rural education can be related to what Kuhn (1990) called the scientific revolution: since it enables us to understand the existence of divergent conceptions of education. According to the author referred, the decision to accept a paradigm is always simultaneous with the decision to accept oneself in its diversity and fullness so that the judgment that leads to the decision involves the comparison of

both with nature and the comparison of one paradigm with the other.

In our analyses, we have seen that PRONERA acted in that context as an instrument for the democratization of knowledge in the countryside, in order to propose and support education projects which use methodologies that value the dialogic relationship and the development of agrarian reform areas, as a new paradigm of Rural Education. This means that their proposal sought to contemplate in the curriculum the socio-cultural values and traits of the various populations living in rural settlements, whose collective identity was built in the processes of struggle for land and social rights. In this direction Silva (2010, p. 181) points out that:

... a pedagogy to meet the peoples of the countryside, must consider the symbolic elements of the cultures that guide the lifestyles of these learners and communities, especially with regard to productive alternatives, their practices and rituals, their cures, festivities, temporalities and spatialities. Denying, camouflaging or trying to silence such differentiations was, and continues to be, the great misconception, absence and failure of the public policies directed at the rural people, above all, when it comes to the modality of teaching that will assist young people and adults.

Meanwhile, this profile is convergent with what governs educational legislation -

the Law of National Education Guidelines and Bases no. 9394/96 (LDBEN) and the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in Rural Schools, both emanated by the National Education Council (CNE). These devices stimulate new forms of democratic management and recognize the unique identity and diversity of the countryside, giving schools institutional autonomy to develop flexible and contextualized pedagogical proposals.

The Brazilian “countryside” in the educational debate: brief considerations

Education is increasingly becoming one of the indispensable keys to the exercise of full citizenship in contemporary society, in a way that is inclusive, as it is a growth path for people of all ages: children, adolescents, seniors. In this sense, the recovery of the importance of education as a formative process of the human being has been constituted as a movement of struggle for public education, free of charge and of quality. In this perspective, the Brazilian “countryside” is a barn of traditional and innovative educational experiences, involving non-governmental organizations (NGOs), public authorities, trade union leaders and social movements, bringing important reflections on the role of the rural school in relation to the process of social inclusion

of people and the construction of a just and sustainable society.

The Youth and Adult Rural Education is an essential debate nowadays. Its comprehension and the construction of its meaning have advanced considerably, since, in the current days, it has been gaining more and more representative space in the local, regional and national agendas, evidencing its relevance in the political sphere due to the strong performance of the Landless Rural Worker's Movement (MST). This, in turn, has articulated to other instances of social movements and peasants, in the construction of partnerships, joint agendas and strategies of resistances and struggles, such as: meetings, public actions that seek to reflect, among other things, on the situation of the rural schools and the educational proposals aimed at them.

The 1st National Conference for a Basic Rural Education, held in Luziânia, Goiás State, from June 27 to 30, 1998, brought together entities such as the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil - CNBB, the Landless Rural Workers Movement - MST, the United Nations Children's Fund - UNICEF, the University of Brasilia - UnB and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - UNESCO. Together, these organizations committed themselves to

sensitize and mobilize society and government bodies in the formulation of public policies that guarantee the right to education for the rural population, committing themselves to the registration, in five books, of all the discussions, research and experiences from the debates.

In this event, researchers such as Arroyo and Fernandes (1999), Benjamin and Caldart (2002; 2004), Calazans (1993), Molina (1999), Oliveira (2004), Souza, Kolling (2002), Cerioli (2002), which have become references in the discussion and practical actions, mark a movement that materializes in a continuous struggle for the concretization and valorization of the education of the countryside as a new policy that aims at the development of a national popular project that respects the social subjects living in and of the countryside.

The discussions, reflections and ideas generated in the many meetings and seminars were carefully condensed, constituting the true flags of struggle of organized social movements, which reaffirm the importance of consolidating a quality education, adequate to the way of living, thinking and producing of the populations identified with the countryside, that is, farmers, extractivists, breeders, riparians, fishermen, caçaras, quilombolas,

rubber tappers, among other subjects of this new paradigm of rural education.

To better understand this premise, it is important to clarify some aspects that were fundamental to the understanding of the question on which we propose to reflect. We will prioritize two of these issues in this dialogue. The first one refers to the distinction between Rural Education and Countryside Education, and the second brings our reflections on some assumptions used in the construction of a national education policy in the countryside.

Changing the concept of rural education and (re) valuing education in the Brazilian countryside as a tool for reflection

In the history of Brazilian education, the first initiatives of rural education emerged in the late 1910s, when advocates of social order, together with the rural and industrial oligarchies of that time, began to show interest in educational problems.

In the 1920s, there was great swelling in cities, with rural-urban migration becoming a constant threat to the social issue by mobilizing politicians and educators for a single cause. According to Paiva (2006, p. 137),

... it was necessary to contain the migration and one of the instruments to fix the country man was education. Not any education, but an education not only “regionalized” in

accordance with the precepts of the New School, ensuring its efficiency and penetration, as an education specifically geared to the rural milieu and its values.

The establishment of man on the land was the objective of scarce educational policies, guided by theoretical conceptions called “pedagogical ruralism”, which, at that moment, showed the need to build a rural school focused on the interests of the region. Thus, “an attempt was made to make the rural man understand the rural sense of Brazilian civilization and to reinforce its values in order to establish him on the land”. (Paiva, 2006, p. 137).

In the following decades, some movements arising from the so-called “enthusiasm for education” began to emerge. These movements, in turn, will be reflected in government actions and public policies, since their direction is shared by government and educators, among them Lourenço Filho and Fernando de Azevedo, pioneers in proposing the creation of an educational system in the countryside.

The launching of campaigns aimed at youth and adult literacy, as well as the Popular Education Programs (1945 and 1960), the majority of which had characteristics of assistance (Rural Village Project/1945 and Rural Service/1955) proved to be too prejudiced, labeling the illiterate adult as an unadjusted,

uneducated, backward element, that is, “illiteracy was seen as a cause and not as a fact of scarce Brazilian development”. (Cunha, 1999, p. 12).

On the other hand, other movements, in turn, presented initiatives specifically aimed at the rural population, such as the radio schools organized by the Basic Education Movement (MEB), which, through a strong influence from Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, advocated a conception of education aimed at liberation. Freire sought, through his pedagogy, a new understanding about the relationship between educational problems and the social problems of the time. Thus, he affirmed that it was necessary that the educational process interfered in the social structure that produces illiteracy. Previously mentioned as a cause of poverty and marginalization, illiteracy has come to be interpreted as an effect of the poverty situation generated by the structure, so that adult literacy and basic education should always be based on a critical examination of reality. In this way, Paulo Freire recognizes in the process of literacy the possibility of the passage from naive to critical consciousness. In this sense, its pedagogy presents itself as a former and as an impediment to the massification of individuals, leading to freedom through dialogue.

Therefore, Freire conceived the learner as subject of his learning, proposing an educational action that did not deny his culture, but that was transforming it through dialogue.

After the 1964 coup, popular groups working on adult literacy in the city and in the countryside were repressed, like the

Movimento de Educação de Base - MEB, by aligning themselves with the guidelines of a Freirian popular education. The government began to control the initiatives, replacing them with the ABC Crusade (Educational campaign for youth and adult literacy, held from 1966 to 1970, under the military regime) and then the Brazilian Literacy Movement – former MOBREAL, which discredited in the political and educational circles, extinguished in 1985, with the process of redemocratization of the country.

At the end of the 1970s, the discussion about rural education came back to the scene when, according to Di Pierro and Andrade (2005, p. 6),

the Brazilian Federal Government’s Sectorial Plan for Education and Culture sets out to give priority to those in need in rural areas and rural urban peripheries, in order to correct, through government induction, the social problems generated by economic development.

In this period, experiences such as the National Program of Socio-educational and Cultural Actions for the Rural Environment (PRONASEC) and the Program for Extension and Improvement for the Rural Environment (EDURURAL), which according to Palmeira (1990 *apud* Di Pierro; Andrade, 2005, p. 6) “failed due to the lack of commitment to the extension to rural areas of full primary education”.

On the other hand, some groups oriented by popular education continued to carry out small and isolated experiences of adult literacy giving continuity to those proposals interrupted with the military civil coup of 1964.

As a second policy line, these programs affirmed support for local experiences that could be framed as educational actions of unofficial content. The PRONASEC special programs and the National Program of Socio-educational and Cultural Actions for the urban and rural poor (PRODASEC), financed by the Ministry of Education in the early 1980s, were designed to serve the needy populations of rural areas and urban peripheries, in the education-production line.

It can be affirmed that the place of rural education in the process of Brazilian social formation was articulated to a project of conservative modernization, which aimed to subordinate the rural man to the model of urbanization-industrialization implemented in the country. Social relations of production in the countryside turned to the molds of capitalism, that is, it started an adaption of the rural population to the precepts of the dominant culture.

The historical course of education in the middle of 1990 evidences that the

educational project envisions a conception of rural education that proposes to constitute a “new country man” according to new precepts, so that its culture, its organizational forms and its social representations are considered and respected.

Thus, thinking about education linked to culture means building a vision of local education in a long-term perspective, that is, thinking in terms of the formation of the generations, which is directly related to education of values. In addition to being concerned with the cultivation of peasant cultural identity, Rural Education must recover the means of educating human and social values: emancipation, justice, equality, freedom, respect for diversity, and rebuilding, in the new generations, the value of utopia and personal commitment to collective, human causes. In this sense, this conception of education helps to conform a new way of being human, a new way of life in the countryside, a new understanding of history. Rural education must be the expression and movement of the peasant culture transformed by the social struggles of our time.

The Rural Education returns to the agenda of the pedagogical political debate

In the last decades, the reflections that take place around the educational

transformations reinforce the importance of giving more visibility to education for the rural population, now known in Brazil under the denomination of Rural Education, whose conception incorporates a varied historical reality, encompassing the most diverse practices of country life. This educational modality expresses the struggle of the rural people for public policies that guarantee the right to education, to an education that is in the countryside and of the countryside, as Caldart (2002, p. 26) specifies: “... *In*: people have the right to be educated in the place where they live; *Of*: the people have the right to an education thought from the place and with their participation, linked to their culture and their human and social needs”.

The education of and in the countryside arises from the strong presence of the social movements in the struggles for the guarantee of the right to education, constituting, therefore, a concept that must be thought from the action of these movements. Thus, the countryside concept we highlight is aimed at valuing rural workers, respect for the ties and cultural values related to life on and off the land.

Thus, concepts related to sustainability and diversity complement countryside education in order to promote new relationships between people and each

other and with people and nature and all beings of different ecosystems. In addition, it aims to take into account agricultural, agrarian, environmental, economic, social, political and cultural sustainability.

The history of Rural Education is made up of varied and significant educational experiences, which, for the most part, have been implemented outside the governmental sphere. These pedagogical practices, in turn, count on the support of several organizations, movements, political parties, and other entities that have contributed to the construction of a new school in the countryside, a space where the development project for the it presents new resignifications and their historical itinerary.

On the other hand, it is known that the recognition that the people living in the countryside are entitled to an education different from that offered to those living in the cities is recent, innovative and gained strength from the institution, by the National Council of Education, of the Operational Guidelines for Basic Education in countryside schools¹. This recognition goes beyond the notion of geographical space and comprehends cultural needs, social rights and the integral formation of these individuals.

These initiatives reflect a new look at the possibilities that rural space presents, breaking with the preconceived conception that devalues the work and the culture of the countryside, the model of market agriculture and rural success. Thus, the still predominant conception that the countryside is still a prosaic place of backwardness, where the “*jecas-tatu*” live, reduces the countryside to an inert, inferior place with no future. This stereotype reproduces a disparaging image that corresponds to an offer of compensatory education and of low quality.

Obviously, this practice served to conceal the right to a contextualized education, promoting access to citizenship and economic and social assets that respected the ways of living, thinking and producing of the different peoples of the countryside. Rather, what has historically been offered is an instrumental education, reduced to meeting elementary educational needs and labor training, to meet the demands of a given market sector.

Thus, in order to rebuild a new vision, it is necessary to understand the countryside as a social, cultural, dynamic territory as a place of production of life, work, culture, knowledge and values, the production of solidarity, cultural identities, the formation of human subjects. The

countryside as a pedagogical space (Arroyo quoted by Sousa, 2006, p. 10).

It is necessary, above all else, to discuss and discuss the “...countryside as a space of life and resistance that contemplates the *modus vivendi* of the rural man, an ‘*ethos*’”. (Di Pierro & Andrade, 2005, p. 14). In this sense, Fernandes (2002, p. 97) states that:

The rural education is a concept coined with the concern of delimiting a theoretical territory. Our thinking is to defend the right that a population has to think the world from the place where it lives, that is, from the land where it treads better still from its reality.

This conception advocates a new way of constructing an education project, since the education of the countryside is greater than the school, it is present in the movement and organization of the people. So, in this new paradigm of Rural Education, it is recommended to overcome the antagonism between the city, the school and the local culture that come to be seen as complementary and of equal value. At the same time, it is considered and respected the existence of different times and ways of being, living and producing, opposing the pretended superiority of the urban over the rural and admitting various models of organization of education and school.

In this new perspective, it is urgent to fight for an education of the rural areas whose main role is to build a project developed from the peasants, done with their participation and not for them. This means thinking about an education that recovers the social, political and cultural interests of the peasants in function of their reality.

Countryside education that is essentially dialogical, emerges as a new element, thus evidencing a new conception of education which "... legitimizes in its existence the pedagogy of those who are oppressed, as it affirms the rural poor ones as legitimate subjects of an emancipatory and therefore educational project". (Caldart, 2004, p. 21). The theory of dialogic action is based on collaboration, organization and cultural synthesis, which means combating manipulation through revolutionary leadership, having a commitment in the liberation of the oppressed masses.

Under this light, it is necessary to unite to liberate, making people aware of oppressive practices and ideologies, motivating them to transform realities from union and organization, establishing the learning of the pronunciation of the world, where the people say their word. In this theory, the organization cannot be authoritarian, it must be learned, because it

is a pedagogical moment in which the leadership and the people make the learning together, seeking, therefore, to instate the transformation of the reality that mediates them. In this respect, Freire (1987, p. 69) states: "No one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate one another, mediated by the world".

Therefore, this vision of rural life can be constructed from the struggle for the land carried out by the landless, peasants, *quilombolas*, and indigenous peoples. They, with their forms of struggle and resistance, conquered hope, built this reality (Fernandes, 2002).

Brief considerations

Throughout this work, we sought not only to configure the ideas that motivated our research, but above all to show that concrete experiences in the field of education include several actions that involve the most varied social subjects and are therefore the result of a dialogue between the acquired learning in the different experiences, the popular knowledge and systematized knowledge that have been built socially and cooperatively.

The experience lived through this research showed that in the second half of the 90's, there are a number of actions that

are concerned with the high rates of illiteracy among young people and adults throughout the country and are developed in partnership with different actors and diverse social groups. For example, those of the PRONERA, that involves actions of literacy with settled young people and adults; raising of education and the continuing education of educators who work in the primary grades for children, youngsters and adults, and technical and professional training appropriate to the socio-cultural context of the countryside.

Based on our observations, we have noticed that the social movements of the countryside have encouraged the Youth and Adult Education (YAE), as a social demand, to build a new literacy practice. It is a literacy now linked to the needs and challenges of the struggle for agrarian reform, as well as for broader social transformations in our country.

Therefore, this new teaching-learning paradigm has sought, above all, to value the rural culture and daily life of children, young people and adults, in attempt to help them (re) build their identities, establish roots and recognize the countryside as their place of life and work. Thus, the contemporary policies for YAE have been woven through educational practices that over time have been reinvented and consolidated of the most dynamic ways.

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1. This text represents a re-encounter with text entitled *A Concretização e Valorização da Educação de Pessoas Jovens e Adultas do campo como uma nova política: refletindo o PRONERA numa perspectiva paradigmática*, published in the book *Sinais e Sentidos em Educação, Movimentos Sociais e Educação de Jovens e Adultos*, of the University Publishing House of the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB). The referred work went through a re-reading and enlargement to be published in the Brazilian Journal of Rural Education.

ⁱResolution CNE/CEB N. 1, April 03, 2002.

Article Information


Received on June 12th, 2019
Accepted on August 20th, 2019
Published on December, 11th, 2019

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.

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How to cite this article

APA

Pereira, F. A., & Silva, S. B. (2019). PRONERA in a paradigmatic perspective: The experience of Youth and Adult Education in the countryside. *Rev. Bras. Educ. Camp.*, 4, e7024. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20873/uft.rbec.e7024>

ABNT

PEREIRA, F. A.; SILVA, S. B. PRONERA in a paradigmatic perspective: The experience of Youth and Adult Education in the countryside. **Rev. Bras. Educ. Camp.**, Tocantinópolis, v. 4, e7024, 2019. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20873/uft.rbec.e7024>