

Rural Education in a Decolonial Turn: the Community - Time Experience at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF)¹

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ABSTRACT. Rural Education in Brazil, in five decades, has been constructing an educational practice that values and includes the subjects, the lores and the social experiences of the countryside; that is, the Pedagogy of Alternation. In the university context, Alternance reorganizes the spaces of learning in Community-Time (CT) and School-Time (ST) and, therefore, proposes questions to the logics of colonization/modernity of knowledge, imposed on Latin America. In this reorganization, the present research has as objective: to know the process of construction of Community-Time, implemented in the Interdisciplinary Degree in Rural Education (UFF), to identify decolonial pedagogical elements that potentiate the formation of educators in the rural zone. Methodologically, we adopted a qualitative-oriented research, which is inscribed in the interpretative approach. To collect data, we performed semi-structured interviews with 5 teachers and 12 students; documentary analysis of the 12 projects of the Thematic Fields of Community-Time. The main results point to the importance of Community-Time in of rural educators' formation as well as in the processes of transformation of reality. Likewise, the power of action-reflection of the Community-Time in encouraging actions to strengthen citizenship and the organization of emancipatory struggles.

Keywords: Rural Education, Pedagogy of Alternation, Training of Rural Educators, Community-Time, Decolonization.

Educação do Campo em *giro decolonial*: a experiência do Tempo Comunidade na Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF)

RESUMO. A Educação do Campo no Brasil, em cinco décadas, vem construindo uma prática educativa que valoriza e inclui os sujeitos, os saberes e as experiências sociais do campo; ou seja, a Pedagogia da Alternância. Em âmbito universitário, a Alternância reorganiza os *espaços/tempos* de aprendizagens em Tempo Universidade e Tempo Comunidade e, portanto, propõe questionamentos à lógica da colonialidade/modernidade do saber, imposta à América Latina. Nessa reorganização, a presente pesquisa tem por objetivo: *conhecer* o processo de construção do Tempo Comunidade, implementado na Licenciatura Interdisciplinar em Educação do Campo (UFF) para, então, *identificar* os elementos pedagógicos *decoloniais* que potencializam a formação de educadores do campo. Metodologicamente, adotamos uma proposta de pesquisa qualitativa inscrita no enfoque interpretativo. Para coletar as informações realizamos entrevistas semiestruturadas com 5 docentes e 12 estudantes do curso; análise documental dos 12 projetos dos eixos temáticos do Tempo Comunidade. Os principais resultados sinalizam a importância do Tempo Comunidade na formação de educadores do campo, bem como nos processos de transformação da realidade. Igualmente, o poder da ação-reflexão do Tempo Comunidade em desencadear ações de fortalecimento da cidadania e da organização de lutas emancipatórias.

Palavras-chave: Educação do Campo, Pedagogia da Alternância, Formação de Educadores do Campo, Tempo Comunidade, Decolonialidade.

Educación del Campo en *giro decolonial*: la experiencia del Tiempo Comunidad en la Universidad Federal Fluminense (UFF)

RESUMEN. La Educación del Campo en Brasil, en cinco décadas, ha estado construyendo una práctica educativa que valora e incluye los sujetos, el conocimiento y las experiencias sociales del campo; es decir, la Pedagogía de la Alternancia. En el contexto universitario, la Alternancia reorganiza los *espacios/tiempos* de aprendizaje en Tiempo Universidad y Tiempo Comunidad y, por lo tanto, propone cuestionamientos a la lógica de la colonialidad/modernidad del saber impuesta a la América Latina. En esta reorganización, la presente investigación tiene como objetivo: *conocer* el proceso de construcción del Tiempo Comunitario, implementado en la Licenciatura Interdisciplinar en Educación del Campo (UFF) para, entonces, *identificar* los elementos pedagógicos decoloniales que potencializan la formación de educadores del campo. Metodológicamente, adoptamos una propuesta de investigación cualitativa inscrita en el enfoque interpretativo. Para recopilar la información realizamos entrevistas semiestructurada con 5 profesores y 12 estudiantes del curso; análisis documental de los 12 proyectos de los ejes temáticos del Tiempo Comunidad. Los principales resultados indican la importancia del Tiempo Comunidad en la formación de los educadores del campo, así como en los procesos de transformación de la realidad. Igualmente, el poder de la acción-reflexión del Tiempo Comunidad en la activación de acciones para fortalecer la ciudadanía y la organización de luchas emancipatorias.

Palabras clave: Educación del Campo, Pedagogía de la Alternancia, Formación de Educadores del Campo, Tiempo Comunidad, Decolonialidad.

Introduction

As part of their struggle for land, rural social movements are calling for the right to education that encompasses their sociohistorical demands. These movements understand that rural education is a powerful tool for understanding the political, economic, social, and environmental relations that cut across rural areas. Hence, the type of education demanded by popular movements “does not apply to the classes that hold economic and political power”. (Ribeiro, 2010, p. 47). Instead, it helps social actors to organize the class consciousness to which they belong and, therefore, their demands for an education that reflects their specific needs and circumstances. Within this context, the construction of rural education takes place in a space of struggle and political dispute played out by social movements in defense of school education plans that address the specificities of rural peoples. These specificities include “Pedagogy of Alternation”, which can be understood as an element that disarticulates *colonial* educational practices that promote the uprooting of identities and territories.

When it comes to the training of rural educators, in many aspects, Pedagogy of Alternation may be regarded as a *decolonial* practice, above all because it “enables young people in rural areas to

continue their studies and have access to scientific and technical knowledge, not as given by someone else, but as knowledge conquered and built upon the problematization of their reality”. (Cordeiro, Reis & Hage, 2011, p. 116). Problematization potentiates social dialogue and practices across different *space-times* of learning and of the construction and transformation of reality: the time of the university and the time of the community. It therefore evokes the inseparability “of systematized knowledge in university settings and the knowledge historically constructed by rural people’s in the process of work and organizing the conditions for the reproduction of life and in processes of class organization”. (Santos, 2012, p. 632). Thus, both conditions for the reproduction of rural life and processes of class organization are powerful tools for destabilizing the violence perpetrated against rural peoples by the logic of coloniality/modernity. Educational processes in the *decolonial turn* have therefore been proposed in an attempt to emphasize:

- (a) The original narrative that revives and inscribes Latin America as the foundational continent for colonialism and, therefore, modernity;
- (b) the importance of Latin America as the first test

laboratory for racism at the service of colonialism; (c) the recognition of colonial difference, a difference that is more difficult to identify empirically today, but nonetheless forms the basis of some of the origins of other differences; (d) the verification of the oppressive structure of the triad coloniality of power, knowledge, and being as a way of denouncing and reframing the continuity of colonization and imperialism, despite the fact that the historical milestones of both process have come to an end; (e) the decolonial perspective, which provides fresh utopian and radical horizons for thinking about human liberation in dialogue with knowledge production. (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 110).

The *decolonial turn* is being constructed by different scholars, environmentalists, trade union members, leaders of social movements, and other actors who, since the twentieth century, have set in motion utopian and analytical renewal and tensions, particularly in the social sciences in Latin America. As part of this dispute, in the last 500 years, Amerindian epistemologies have constructed different forms of *decolonial* struggle against processes of *invasion*, *appropriation*, and *violence* (Andrade, 2018; 2019). *Territory* – as an expression of all forms of life, culture, ancestry, and identity – is an extremely important part of this struggle (Andrade, 2019). Based on more than two decades of research, Walter Mignolo (2007, p. 27) developed the following thesis about the contributions of

Amerindians to decolonial struggles: “decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality as its contraposition. And this occurred in the Americas, as part of indigenous and Afro-Caribbean thinking”. This thesis alludes to the traditional peoples and rural communities who, among other forms of violence, have been/and continue to be reviled by the logic of colonization.

As regards the construction of the *decolonial turn* in Latin America, “the emergence of the concept of ‘coloniality of being’ responds to the need to clarify the question of the effects of coloniality not only on the mind of subaltern subjects, but also on the lived experience”. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 130). These effects include epistemic racism, which, intrinsic to Western abstract universalism, decharacterizes and delegitimizes traditional peoples, their discourses, spaces of speech, and identities (Grosfoguel, 2007). In this sense, the political and epistemological proposal of rural education provides a way of confronting this delegitimization, because one of the meanings of rural education is “to reverse the views and a history of brutal treatment of these groups as inferior, at the margin of cultural, social, and pedagogical history”. (Arroyo, 2012, p. 363). In the struggle for this project, the disputes of rural social

movements in defense of an education that promotes access to and permanence in territories are not detached from the elements that destabilize coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, since:

Rural education was born as mobilization/pressure from social movements for an education policy for rural communities: it was born out of a combination of the struggles of the landless for the implementation of public schools in agricultural reform settlements with the struggles and resistance of numerous rural organizations and communities against the loss of their schools, experiences with education, communities, territory, and identity. (Caldart, 2008, p. 71).

Within this process of ideological construction of rural education, particularly at a time when we are celebrating a decade of expansion of rural education courses in public universities, we highlight the struggle of rural people's against the hegemonic project that seeks to colonize schools. Some subtleties are incorporated into this project with a view to demarcating ideological positions that converge towards the subalternization of rural peoples and, therefore, the denial of access to and permanence in their territories. Within this context, rural education, as a *decolonial* political and pedagogical element, is not detached from the conceptual disputes that translate the opposite meanings of colonization. The resignification of the concept of rural education in the law that

outlines the guidelines and bases of education in Brazil (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação - LDB*) (Brasil, 1996), reveals the advances and achievements made by emancipatory social struggles. These advances are made especially when rural social movements understand that, as Caldart puts it (2002, p. 18), education *in* rural areas means that "the people have the right to be educated in the place where they live". In turn, education *from* rural areas emphasizes that "the people have a right to an education thought from their place and with their participation, bound to their culture and their human and social needs". (Caldart, 2002, p. 18).

Despite contradictory ideological positions, the discussion of curriculum content and methodologies that reflect the specific needs and circumstances of rural peoples proposed by the 1996 LDB has gained force nationally. In this respect, the I National Meeting of Agrarian Reform Educators in 1997 (I ENERA) is seen as an initial milestone for the national rural education movement (Molina, 2015). Further down the line in 2010, the rural people's struggle commemorated the introduction of the National Rural Education Policy created by Decree 7352 (November 4, 2010). Article 4 of the Decree stress that the policy is directed at both basic and higher education (Brasil,

2010). One of the outcomes of Decree 7352 was the Licentiate in Rural Education Support Program (Procampo)². Created in 2012, the program's primary aim is to support the incorporation of licentiate degrees in rural education into public universities throughout the country.

The creation of Procampo has broadened the debate surrounding issues in rural education. The initial training of rural educators is bound to the construction of an education policy that addresses the concerns and demands of rural populations and, in particular, emancipation and the recovery of identity (Santos, 2012). In this respect, one of aspects addressed by Procampo is the theoretical and methodological framework of the course curriculum: the refoundation of rural education based on counter-hegemonic emancipatory logic. In other words, a powerful educational project capable of destabilizing processes of domination imposed by colonial thinking – which seeks to uproot rural peoples from their identities and territories – to the detriment of the advance of capital (Andrade, Nogueira & Rodrigues, 2019). This project materializes in articulation with other political components and theoretical and methodological principles of rural education geared towards the emancipation of social actors. These principles include

Pedagogy of Alternation, which envisages two distinct learning *space-times*: the time of the school and the time of the community.

The time of the school (TS) is understood as a stage of the course corresponding to an academic semester, in a period of approximately 50 eight-hour instructional days. The time of the community (TC) is devoted to the period in which students are in their communities of origin, when they carry out their studies and research, prompting theoretical and practical reflection on issues concerning rural education, teaching and learning processes, school and community management, and the concrete reality in which the school is embedded. These activities are guided and monitored by the course's teacher-trainers in the TS. (Ferreira & Molina, 2016, p. 1710).

With regard to these two elements, it is important to stress that “the time of the community potentiates rural educator training process, because through the dialogue between theory and practice it is possible to learn *with* traditional values and *with* traditional knowledge to think new forms of teaching and learning”. (Andrade *et al.* 2019, p. 162). With reference to this dialogue, Ribeiro (2010) elucidates that the term Pedagogy of Alternation has several meanings, which vary according to certain conditions, such as: the subjects who take ownership of this approach; the region where this approach is adopted; and local conditions, which can facilitate or hinder

the practice of alternation. A common thread runs through the varying concepts of alternation: “productive labor as the principle of a humanistic education that articulates dialectically formal teaching and productive labor”. (Ribeiro, 2010, p. 293). From this perspective, the key focus of rural educator training is autonomy, self-determination, and freedom, enabling educators to destabilize the oppressive colonial logic that has subjected rural people’s to epistemological subalternization over centuries.

Research with rural education: the construction of the university’s social experience with *the decolonial turn*

The Interdisciplinary Licentiate in Rural Education (ILRE) offered by Fluminense Federal University (UFF, acronym in Portuguese) was created in 2015. The course project is one of the outcomes of the National Rural Education Program (Pronacampo) launched in 2012. One of the main aims of the program was to provide technical and financial support “for the implementation of the National Rural Education Policy, providing assistance to rural and Quilombola schools in four core areas: 1. Management and Pedagogical Practices; 2. Educator Training; 3. Professional and Technological Education; and 4. Infrastructure”. (Molina, 2015, p. 147).

Area 2 is specifically concerned with “State action responsible for supporting and making happen the implementation of 42 new licentiate courses in rural education (*Licenciatura em Educação do Campo – LEDOC*), via a subprogram called the ‘Licentiate in Rural Education Support Program – Procampo’”. (Molina, 2015, p. 147).

It was within this context that the conquest of the social movement for rural education materialized, responding to historic calls for rural educator training that addresses the specific educational rights of rural people’s. It is in this *space-time* of political gains in terms of racial and epistemological diversity that the Brazilian government started to integrate different social and cultural actors into public universities, strengthening the capacity of counter-hegemonic struggles to question, among other elements: the myth of racial democracy; colonial educational practices; processes that uproot rural populations from their identity and territories; and environmental injustice and the violation of the rights of rural populations and nature. All of these elements are part of the ILRE, articulating possibilities for the destabilization of the modernity/coloniality imposed on Latin America. In this respect, powerful aspects of the course enable the construction of

“bridges of convergence between intellectual projects, between interpretive communities, between the disciplines that study the social and cultural (spheres), and also between these and local knowledge”.

(Walsh, 2013, p. 14). Among these bridges, we highlight the proposals of the 12 core themes of the ILRE developed in the time of the community.

Box 1 – Core themes of the ILRE in the time of the community.

Themes	Objectives
Bioethics as a philosophical-pedagogical tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To think rural education from the perspective of bioethics, identifying, problematizing, and intersecting markers of exclusion. - To encourage reflection on the prejudice, discrimination, violence, and oppression in the field of bioethics that cut across relations in rural areas, rural schools, and rural social movements with a view to identifying voices that remain subalternized and unseen bodies who seek to resist along the paths imposed by existing rules.
Citizenship in rural areas: associations, rural unions, and organization in rural areas in the Santo Antônio de Padua region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To map associations (existing and no longer existing) and search archives and historic sources to study rural unions and associations. - To understand support networks, the struggle for rights, and issues related to agrarian reform in the region and the process of construction of citizenship among these historical subjects.
Everyday life, memories, narratives, and oral history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focusing on the daily lived experiences of rural communities, to research the memories of individual and collective subjects and their struggles to improve their livelihoods; using oral history and images, emphasizing the valorization of people in their multiple educational networks, in their engagement with a broad array of knowledge and tasks bound to nature, the environment, agroecology, education, different cultures, and new ways of thinking the relationship between urban and rural areas, among others.
Education and environmental justice in the Vale do Rio Pomba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate conflict situations, environmental injustice, and resistance movements in rural areas linked to rural populations, with special focus on the Vale do Rio Pomba. - To promote discussions with rural populations on the role of education as a tool of resistance and empowerment to combat environmental injustice.
Education and sustainability: pedagogical and community practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To discuss and signify the concept of and educational practices for sustainability inside and outside schools. - To adopt pedagogical and community practices that dialogue with concepts of sustainability associated with social experiences constructed in different historical and geographical contexts, focusing on rural populations and bringing together academic knowledge and rural people's knowledge and practices.
Popular health education: emphasis on women and children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With an emphasis on women and children from rural areas, forests, and riverine communities, to recognize the importance of shared health knowledge and experiences, focusing on: participation and participatory management; knowledge formation, communication, and production; healthcare; and intersectorality and multicultural dialogue.
Mapping rural schools in Rio de Janeiro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To map rural schools in the State of Rio of Janeiro to identify the regions with the largest number of schools.

<p>Black people in universities: blackness, education, and social movements</p>	<p>- To provide students with the opportunity to study themes related to education in its widest possible sense, discussing the relationship between blackness and education and focusing on topics such as: access to higher education; construction of the black student movement; teaching techniques and the application of Law 10639/03 in schools, emphasizing Indigenous and Quilombola Education; and studies of the history of black people in Brazil.</p>
<p>Rural Experience Internship Program: interdisciplinary practices in rural education</p>	<p>- To develop actions directed at the analysis of agrarian, rural, and agricultural socio-territorial processes, focusing on phenomena that encompass the development of sustainable rural territories and drawing on references from geographical sciences, agroecology, and other related sciences.</p>
<p>Health and illness among remnant populations: production of material on treatment for sickle cell anemia</p>	<p>- To develop an intervention proposal together with the remnant population aimed at reducing the negative impacts of sickle cell disease in the Queimados and Cruzeiroinho de Cima regions.</p>
<p>Territories as places of dwelling and work: community organization of working families</p>	<p>- To articulate and develop research on demands for spaces of sociocultural reproduction, resistance, and the knowledge of working families in rural and urban territories, involving actions and policies directed at community mobilization and organization and establishing specific relationships of dependence and autonomy between groups, associations, social movements, government agencies, and non-government organizations.</p>
<p>Symbolic Spatial Trenches: space, culture, identity, and social memory</p>	<p>- To develop research, interventions, and experiences in Pádua and other towns aimed at recording, recovering, and/or unveiling the lived space, popular culture, and social memories constructed in everyday life, and considering the historical impacts of the land occupation process and other elements that influence the symbolic and economic valorization urban places.</p>

Source: Authors' elaboration. Data provided by the course secretary (June 2019).

Against the current backdrop of democratic erosion, these core themes bring together decolonial elements that aim to promote social, political, ontological, and epistemic struggles for freedom. The aim of the course is to train students to become rural educators. With emphasis on human and social sciences, it is building a system of alternation according to the students' specific needs and characteristics. In the time of the university the students experience an interdisciplinary curriculum

with discussions and epistemic constructions that address the plurality of the reality in rural areas in Brazil. In the time of the community, the students potentiate their political-pedagogical practices, enabling them to understand, among other topics: the reality of rural schools and populations; ecocide and other processes involving the *appropriation* and voracious *commercialization* of nature; and genocide in the struggle for land; and the ethnocide of aboriginal and traditional

peoples, their ancestral knowledge, and their otherness. Armed with this understanding, these future teachers will be equipped to make a significant contribution to constructing and strengthening emancipatory struggles and *decolonial* educational practices.

The course currently has 13 permanent professors. All professors have a doctorate awarded in varying fields: *Anthropology* (2); *Education* (2); *Philosophy* (3); *Geography* (1); *History of Sciences and Health* (3); *Social Psychology* (1); and *Public Health* (1). Other professors from the Human Sciences Department also collaborate with the

course, teaching mainly optional modules. The course has 90 enrolled and active students, which includes regularly enrolled students registered in modules and those who have requested a temporary suspension and are still able to return to their studies^[3]. Five professors and 12 students participated in this study. The primary *objective* of the study was to *understand* the process of construction of the time of the community in the ILRE in order to *identify* decolonial pedagogical elements that potentiate rural educator training.

Box 2 - academic characteristics of the study participants and their relationship with the time of the community.

Core themes on the time of the community	Professors		Students
	Core Theme Coordination	Admission	Study period
Bioethics as a philosophical-pedagogical tool	Philosophy (P2*)	March 2016	Period 3 (E7** ; E8)
Citizenship in rural areas: associations, rural unions, and organization in rural areas in the Santo Antônio de Padua region	---	---	Period 5 (E12)
Everyday life, memories, narratives, and oral history	---	---	Period 8 (E3)
Education and Sustainability: pedagogical and community practices	---	---	Period 5 (E10) Period 8 (E1; E9)
Mapping rural schools in Rio de Janeiro	Anthropology (P1)	July 2014 [#]	Period 1 (E11)
Black people at University: blackness, education, and social movements	History (P3)	December 2013 [#]	Period 3 (E4; E5)
Rural Experience Internship Program: interdisciplinary practices in rural education	Geography (P5)	February 2016	Period 8 (E3)
Health and illness among remnant populations: production of material on treatment for sickle cell anemia	History (P4)	August 2015	Period 3 (E6)

Source: Authors' elaboration. Study data (June 2019).

*Professor interview identification code.

**Student interview identification code.

#Professors involved in the course implementation process in March 2015.

The collaboration of the study participants *with* the study took the form of semi-structured interviews administered in June 2019. The interviews were conducted randomly, whereby eight of the longest-serving staff and 14 students were asked to participate in the study and those who answered positively were interviewed. In addition to the interviews, we performed a document analysis of the course plans for each of the 12 core themes on the time of the community, concentrating on the objectives outlined in box 1. Data processing and analysis was conducted using the free software **R**, followed by the creation of word cloud graph. Based on the word cloud and the theoretical framework, we established the following categories of analysis: a) the importance attached to the time of the community; b) the most significant learning experiences through the eyes of the professors and students; c) knowledge potentiated during training.

The theoretical framework consisted of the following concepts: *coloniality of power*, which determines economic and political processes; *coloniality of knowledge*, which gives rise to epistemic, linguistic, and cultural violences; and *coloniality of being*, which perpetuates the oppression and control of the desires, sexuality, and social functions attributed to

genders (Mignolo, 2007). Each of these colonialities determine the life of rural populations; hence, the emphasis on the *coloniality of knowledge* in this study, viewed as colonial educational practices and, therefore, oppressors of cultural racial, and gender diversities and drivers of epistemic violences and the uprooting of rural peoples from their identities and territories. To think in terms of the destabilization of this coloniality, particularly in rural educator training processes, is a victory in the struggle for educational rights that differ from those produced by Eurocentric thinking. This is because, “the coloniality of knowledge reveals ... the epistemological legacy of Eurocentrism, which prevents us from understanding the world from the very world we live in and its own epistemes”. (Porto-Gonçalves, 2005, p. 3).

With these arguments, for various reasons discussed below, thinking about educational processes from the perspective of one's own world and epistemes embodies the time of the community as an educational practice into the *decolonial turn*. The epistemological position adopted in this study therefore reiterates Mignolo's thinking (2007, p. 29) when he defends that “The decolonial turn is the opening and the freedom from the thinking and the

forms of living (economies-other, political theories-other), the cleansing of the coloniality of being and of knowledge”. And especially when he highlights that *the decolonial turn* represents “the de-linking from the spell of the rhetoric of modernity, from its imperial imaginary articulated in the rhetoric of democracy ... (it) has as its reason of being and its objective the decoloniality of power (that is to say, of the matrix of colonial power)”. (Mignolo, 2007, p. 29-30). This matrix constitutes the structural element that shapes Brazilian society, operated primarily by a colonial educational logic.

As one of the counter-hegemonic responses to the coloniality of knowledge, Pedagogy of Alternation demarcates the theoretical-methodological and epistemological field of rural education, drawing on other perspectives and forms of understanding of the world and reality. It does this especially through the lens of subalternized social subjects, silenced and reviled by coloniality/modernity. These subjects include social actors from rural areas, who over the last decade, through their social and political struggles, have managed to materialize rural educator training processes that reflect their demands. They also include the students and professors from the ILRE, who are rewriting their history from the perspective

of the time of the community. As part of this rewriting process, we articulated an *interpretive qualitative* research proposal, which, by adopting a decolonial theoretical and methodological approach, becomes a critical tool for unveiling social reality.

Social reality in Latin America is submerged in historical, economic, political, social, and environmental elements that carry the marks of five centuries of invasion, appropriation, and violence (Andrade, 2018; 2019). This interpretive approach therefore helps understand this reality and, more specifically, the processes of colonization of educational institutions and of their privileged knowledge. At the same time, it helps analyze data and construct narratives, thought with the subjects of the course. In this respect, the interpretive approach “is always the production of a new meaning of events, which, in their relationship, do not have meanings a priori. The interpretation of information occurs throughout the study and fuels new constructions in the process”. (Rossato & Martínez, 2017, p. 344). In the present study, the interpretive approach entails reading the world from the researcher’s own perspective, constructing the interpretation in terms of meanings to which we assign symbolic value.

Thought *with* rural education, *with* Pedagogy of Alternation, and thus reflected in the time of the community, symbolic interpretive constructions translate forms in the way “each researcher constructs and reconstructs the research problem woven by his/her social, historical, cultural, and – primarily – epistemological experiences and perceptions, which is what makes it possible to recognize the existence of a research problem”. (Rossato & Martínez, 2017, p. 344). Thus, our epistemological interpretations in this study build on the contributions made with/by interlocutors such as Aníbal Quijano, Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves, Catherine Walsh, Edgardo Lander, Marlene Ribeiro, Miguel Arroyo, Mônica Molina, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Ramón Grosfoguel, Roseli Caldart, and Santiago Castro-Gómez. With respect to the research problem, we turned to the recognition of the historic debt of epistemic racism against rural populations. For this reason, we remained true to the discourses obtained from the interviews of just some of the political actors involved in developing the proposal for rural education at the UFF.

**Other ways of understanding the world:
the experience of rural education at the
UFF**

Within the proposal of the time of the university and the time of the community, Pedagogy of Alternation is a *decolonial* political endeavor that enables dialogue between the wide range of epistememes that exist in Latin America. In its essence, it promotes new pluralist perspectives on knowledge production that aim to “integrate the actions of students in constructing the knowledge necessary for their training”. (Molina & Freitas, 2011, p. 28). Pedagogy of Alternation is therefore an important tool for promoting epistemological breaks and destabilizing the hegemonic logic of knowledge production. Hence, it creates pedagogical opportunities for liberation from colonial education models, particularly: when it underscores the importance of the time of the community in bridging the chasm between theory and practice; and when it defends the principle of freedom of rural peoples, who, as historical subjects, organize and articulate emancipatory social struggles in defense of their territory, identity, and ancestry. These questions were presented in the interviews conducted with the professors and students from the ILRE as shown in the following word cloud.

(2.3%). Based on the repetition of these words, we established the three categories of analysis described above. The results related to these categories are presented below by way of a dialectical construction focusing on the discourses from the interviews.

Bridges and social and epistemic struggles: the importance of the time of the community in rural educator training

Growing literature on decolonial theories and methodologies has highlighted the relevance and potential of Pedagogy of Alternation for building the capacities of rural peoples over half a century of constitution and consolidation in Brazil (Cordeiro *et al.*, 2011). This relevance is illustrated in the discourses of the students and professors, whose responses complement each other, while at the same revealing the diversity of ideas that characterize the importance attached to the time of the community. This diversity strengthens the structural bases of Pedagogy of Alternation, opening new counter-hegemonic educational horizons that differentiate *decolonial* educational movements, since “living precedes learning”. (Arroyo, 2014, p. 254). On the ILRE, these movements are consolidated in the perception of the protagonists of the time of the community and its respective

core themes. These areas are tailored to the students’ demands, designed to (re)create and potentiate academic knowledge, building from shared realities and communities. On this question, the study participants highlight that:

The time of the community enables involvement in the theme not only through books, texts, and films, which we evidently need to use as a tool for understanding the world. It also broadens (understanding) and “repositions” us in the world. The time of the community invites us to “protagonize” the texts, struggles, and causes that we get involved in within each module in the classroom. It breaks with the very comprehension of a module, of a course, of university, understanding that knowledge production takes place (not only) in the classroom, within formal educational settings, but also outside these settings (P2).

The findings highlight that the social, political, and epistemic importance of the time of the community becomes even more evident when it repositions students in their own community, not only as a student, but also as a future educator, a fruit of this reality. This argument is strengthened in the discourse of one of the interviewees, who emphasizes that “it was in the time of the community that I reconnected with rural schools, not as a student, but as an educator, someone willing to change political and social reality; with a leaning towards freedom, through the emancipatory education that

the course and the time of the community provide” (E9). This reconnection with the community to which she belongs resignifies the critical perception of her reality, producing decolonial *pedagogies* and *movements* that converge towards the transformation of emancipatory social structures. It is possible that these movements are strengthened by the fact that “critically reading the world political-pedagogical doing; it is inseparable from the pedagogical-political doing, that is, from political action that involves the organization of groups and of the popular classes to intervene in the reinvention of society”. (Freire, 2000, p. 21). Within this reinvention:

The role of alternation in this pedagogy is to make the connection between knowledges. Between knowledges that you gain in your everyday life and knowledge that you learn at university; and, more than that, the interconnection between these knowledges, between the practical knowledge that you build every day and university knowledge. So alternation plays a critical role in the interactive construction of this knowledge and provides rural education students a very critical view of the world around them and of knowledge; it enables practical interaction between knowledges and I think that is fundamental (P4).

According to the discourses, the time of the community has shown itself to be an important theoretical and methodological principle that helps to break with colonial

logic, based on the modernity of power/knowledge standard. The construction and foundations of this logic are historically rooted in “a specific rationality or perspective of knowledge that was made globally hegemonic, colonizing and overriding all others, previous or different, and their respective concrete knowledges”. (Quijano, 2005, p. 115). In contrast, dialectically and politically, the time of the community is a decolonial proposal that characterizes the historical struggles of different social actors reflected in the present time. Among these struggles, it is worth highlighting a discourse that points to the core theme that encompasses ecofeminism: “... the importance of the struggle of women for land. We are trying to show a feminist strand that supports these women’s struggles and says that, for there to be women's emancipation, feminism and agroecology must walk hand in hand” (E8). Besides the political and dialectical gains for educator training, the findings also reveal the importance of the time of the community for communities, as illustrated by the following discourse:

I’m at the end of period 5. I’m doing the core theme Education and Sustainability. The theme has broadened my way of understanding rural education tools and how to use them. I’ve been working with two friends on the closure of rural schools... we are studying and

applying the knowledge we have gained in the theme in the field. We are recording the fight for education in Noroeste Fluminense and comparing rural schools that are being closed and others that are receiving investment and being refurbished. We are recording on video in the form of documentaries. We intend to publish various articles and works, making material available to strengthen the struggles (E10).

This account highlights in different ways the importance students and professors attach to the time of the community. The interviews also show that the strengthening of professor-student-community ties has resulted in a more humanized university that recognizes the importance of life trajectories and, therefore, seeks to produce educators willing to think in terms of the plurality of schools, subjects, and learning experiences. In this respect, the time of the community has taken on a central role in the ILRE, because it builds *bridges* to bring historically separated subjects and knowledges closer together. This account of one of the professors justifies the use of the *bridge* metaphor: “(the time of the community) is really a bridge between spaces that – unfortunately, with the way society has organized itself and continues to organize itself – are placed as if separated by walls, borders; ...often invisible walls and borders” (P2).

The *bridge* is a recurring idea in the discourses of the other study participants, illustrated by the following response “the time of the community ends up, in effect, promoting a bridge between these two moments, which are often detached from training. Training only materializes when there is this dialectic, this integration between the two parts” (P1). The discourses indicate that the time of the community plays a critical role in the destabilization of coloniality/modernity rooted in the logic of power/knowledge, because it opens up the following argument for debate: “that any narrative of modernity that does not take into account the impact of the colonial experience on the formation of modern relations of power is not only incomplete, but also ideological”. (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 80). On the topic of ideological narrative, we cannot fail to mention the knowledges that have been forgotten, marginalized, and lost over more than five centuries of *invasion, appropriation, and violence* in Latin America. Nevertheless, rural education is building bridges to confront the reality.

The time of the community and the decolonial proposal: relearning with territories and with rural peoples

The *decolonial* nature of Pedagogy of Alternation makes the rural education teaching and learning process more

meaningful for students. Resignification takes place in the time of the community, in a real attempt to get closer to the context in which the students are embedded; as well as through the social and political use of the knowledges gained in the time of the university, applying them to practical actions geared towards the students' communities. In this sense, we also analyzed what professors and students consider their most significant learning experiences constructed in the time of the community. One of these experiences was the having the opportunity to engage in and contribute to communities' causes and social struggles. Another was bringing academia closer to society; that is, the strengthening of ties, or indeed the building of bridges, in an attempt to actively engage in processes of freedom, autonomy, and defense of specific educational rights for rural communities. This experience, geared towards the construction of social struggle, is highlighted in the following discourse:

It's really important to bring the reality of our communities to the university; and we have done this through the time of the community. The results have been excellent. For example, after two years of hard struggle and resistance, Alice do Amaral Peixoto Municipal School is still fully functioning⁴, which is (particularly) relevant bearing in mind that 232 rural schools have been closed in the State of Rio de Janeiro in little less than a decade

and that three of the five schools here in Pádua considered to be rural by the Education Department have been closed in less than two years. Our core theme has and is being developed in every period that we go through, we are learning in every community that we interact with, overcoming and resisting the current challenges in rural education (E9).

Learning ideas geared to the social demands of communities are a representative element in the respondents' responses, especially those of the students: "we need to have an education that speaks from the social reality of each student and, in this way, achieve educational change in our society, and really develop closer relationships and eliminate the distance between school and society once and for all" (E9). The findings therefore show that the time of the community encompasses a critical nature – which takes distinct forms – to confront *coloniality* and, therefore, promote pedagogical tools that galvanize contemporary social struggles. The many elements that reside in this nature translate reflection-action, one of the salient characteristics of popular education, which has played an important reciprocal role in the organization of the struggles of social movements: "social struggles are also pedagogical settings where participants exercise their pedagogies of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflection, and action". (Walsh, 2013, p. 29). Reflection-

action is promoted through interaction, respecting the differences in the various ways of thinking and existing, as highlighted by one of the professors:

... the greatest learning experience is sharing; sharing and interaction with the other. It's fundamental. Also the question of solidarity in the construction of ties, the friendship that is established with the local community where we work. I think that's the greatest learning experience. It's the student's own experience in the field, in the day-to-day, in doing, in educating, in growing together (P4).

The valorization of learning experiences constructed in interaction is an extremely powerful aspect of the time of the community, because it values the social experience of historically constructed groups. The study participants understand that “knowledge is not passed on solely in the classroom. We have the opportunity to talk and engage in dialogue with people who actually live in rural areas, people who talk from their personal experience” (E8). Another student also stressed that “it has been a great learning experience in all respects, especially the proximity with the community” (E1). Therefore, the time of the community becomes a *space-time* conducive to the promotion of *decolonial turn*; that is, “a shift of perspective and attitude that is found in the practices and forms of knowledge, ... a project of systematic and global transformation of the

presuppositions and implications of modernity taken up by an array of subjects in dialogue”. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 160). This possibility of dialogues is another learning experience highlighted by the respondents, since Pedagogy of Alternation enables the establishment of connections between a varied array of existing epistemologies, as the following professor highlights:

The most significant learning experiences linked to the time of the community are created as we are able to read and reread our lived space, our everyday practices in our communities, with the help of the theoretical framework and theoretical tools that we acquire in the time of the university. So when we manage to establish this dialogue, this reflection, that's where the treasure of this learning experience lies (P5).

The discourses of the students and professors feed back into each other and, consequently, reiterate that the time of the community criticizes any exclusionary actions present in the vertical relations imposed by the coloniality/modernity of knowledge. This is because in decolonial thinking “Modernity is an alterity-generating machine that, in the name of reason and humanism, excludes from its imaginary the hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of concrete forms of life”. (Castro-Gómez, 2005, p. 80). Thus, as well as promoting significant learning experiences, the time of the

community proposes a transgression of the hegemonic model of education in order to create a new pedagogy. With regard to concrete forms of life, the time of the community gives special prominence to “traditional knowledges, knowledges that students bring with them from their experiences in their communities, practices that they establish in life ... related to their way of life, their work, and their way of working” (P5). With regard to transgression, it is worth highlighting the following discourse: “the learning experience that most drew my attention in my core theme was seeing a bit more of the educational organization of the MST (Landless Workers Movement) here in the State of Rio de Janeiro” (E11).

Concrete forms of life and transgression form a new decolonial pedagogical perspective, since the time of the community in the UFF encompasses historical subjects, epistemologies, and territorialities that have been subalternized by the colonization process. These subjects, epistemologies, and territorialities reinvent counter-hegemonic struggles when communities, students, and professors share experiences of historic resistance to the elements that characterize colonization. Hence, they reinvent other learning experiences that are made possible through the construction of experiences in

which “the time of the community is... a time for understanding and experiencing rural areas in their diverse categories of analysis referenced in the classroom, and also those that aren’t referenced” (E12). Moreover, the time of the community allows “students to delight in the infinite experiences of analysis that rural areas have to offer, where we may never have had or would never have had such an opportunity” (E12). These discourses show that the time of the community potentiates unique learning experiences that we cannot put a label on, since each one represents singular ways of life and worldviews.

The experience of the time of the community: potentiated skills and knowledges

With regard to the third category of analysis – knowledges that the study participants believe were potentiated with the time of the community – the word cloud shows that some points stand out in professors’ and students’ response. One of these points is that the studies conducted during the time of the community potentiate the lens through which students view the world as researchers and place the students before reality in a process of reflection-action. The discourses show that the study participants believe that this characteristic of the time of the community is fundamental, because the submersion of

students in research from the beginning of the course means that “the rural education students end up finding it easier, let’s say, to wade through the possibilities offered by academia” (P1). P1 adds that “the time of the community provides this (sense of) security for the research moment, the same security that the researcher, the observer in the field feels; field work, even if some groups are not fieldwork”. The professors also learn during this research process, as the following account shows:

... the greatest learning experience is the learning from research, but in the practice of research. The students (involved) in the construction of our time of the community as it is in the UFF mention this; the “construction” of the student as a student-researcher. In the specific case of my time of the community (the core theme taught by the professor), I believe the greatest learning experience was the question of self, of my role in the academic world. These students, when they perceive themselves as black, as people who face a series of difficulties and barriers to get into university, they realize just how structurally racist Brazilian society really is. This is one of the learning experiences that I think is important; the students realize that there is a funnel for entry into higher education. The higher the level of study, the harder entry is for the black student, and I think this is the great learning experience in practice (P3).

The importance attached to the potential of training, thought *with* research, is revealed in the discourse of another

professor, who stresses that “although we are a licentiate, from the first period everyone places themselves in the condition of a researcher” (P2). Apart from the skills gained from research, it is important to highlight the knowledges that, for the study participants, are related to rural peoples’ knowledge. These knowledges occupy a position of epistemological inferiority imposed by oppressive colonial logic since the European invasion of Latin America. In this sense, as Lander elucidates (2005, p. 10), “the beginning of colonialism in the Americas saw not only the beginning of the colonial organization of the world, but also – simultaneously – the colonial constitution of knowledges, languages, and memory”. By taking this into consideration and assuming a *decolonial* pedagogical position, the time of the community disarticulates the coloniality of knowledge, bringing the knowledges of traditional and rural populations into the academic space, as the following discourse highlights:

The time of the community not only officializes the process of the production and realization of the knowledges of peoples – traditional knowledges – it also valorizes these knowledges within a proposal for dialogue between traditional and scientific knowledge. And, within academia, it also helps to “tension” the perspective of universal knowledge, which universalizes the proposals and European-colonial

perspectives that subjugate, discredit, and diminish the knowledges of aboriginal peoples; thus, the time of the community is more than essential (P5).

The emancipatory role played by the time of the community is a recurring feature in the discourses, with students emphasizing that “its pedagogical policy is differentiated and liberating. It contradicts the logic of conventional teaching and also, we could say, the conjuncture that contemporary society is in” (E1). Equally, students recognize that “the course is at the front line in a battle against various forms of oppression. This position awakens critical and intolerant thinking in the face of actions of exclusion, discrimination, and intolerance (E7)”. These actions are varied, but have one point of convergence: the coloniality of knowledge potentiated by epistemic racism. The latter is one of the least discussed forms of racism in the capitalist and Eurocentric system, which views these knowledges as being produced outside the Western world and inferior to Eurocentric knowledges (Grosfoguel, 2007). To destabilize this coloniality “the time of the community provides this coming together of knowledges and histories that often fail to reach the university” (E9).

The discourses of the students and professors place the skills and knowledges

potentiated in the time of the community at the center of the dialogue. These knowledges overcome the module objectives and reflect off each other as inter-epistemic dialogue with different subjects and territories, which in turn contribute to enhance student training. Various knowledges that are potentiated are placed on the agenda of this dialogue, including “the relationship between medicinal plants and ways of life and the way (this relationship) spans generations” (E3). This is made possible by the interdisciplinary nature of the course, where the core themes on the time of the community cross-cut and complement each other. According to the objectives of the core themes, this dialogue takes place with a view to potentiating knowledges primarily within the following intersectionalities: environment; gender; race; health; territory; and social movements.

All the knowledges potentiated in the time of the community reveal themselves during student training through these intersectionalities. Moreover, the time of the community provides students with a glimpse of their future profession, since “often, we are getting to know our area of work, which are rural schools and peoples” (E10). These aspects reveal some of the potential of the time of the community,

which, as suggested by one of the professors, can be harnessed to enhance the training experience on other degree courses. Hence the perception of P4: “it couldn’t be more promising. I see big things for this course. It has major potential, which is important for our society and for educators”. She adds: “I think this model, this essentially innovative model, could be applied on other courses as well, because it is very important to replicate this experience” (P4). This potential only has meaning due to the historical struggles of social movements, which, still under construction, challenge the colonial logic of the present time, whether in universities or in the ways of thinking and designing education.

Some considerations woven *with* the time of the community...

With this study we have been able to highlight that, among other aspects, the construction of Pedagogy of Alternation in the ILRE takes place in emancipatory *space-times* within the struggle for liberation from the colonialities imposed on Latin America. The time of the community on this course potentiates knowledges, learning experience, and skills thought out in social spaces historically marginalized by the logic of the modernity of power/knowledge, such

as: agricultural reform settlements, *quilombos*, rural workers unions, social movements, rural schools, and life in rural areas. It therefore constitutes a laboratory of social, political, and environmental experiences that challenge and destabilize the coloniality/modernity project that prevails in Brazil. Despite this and other significant victories attained by the course, current political tensions are once again leading to a broadening of the ideology that denies the right to an education that reflects the specific needs and circumstances of rural populations. In this respect, the federal government has introduced “contingency measures”, freezing funding allocated to education and directly jeopardizing and threatening the very existence and permanence of rural education courses in federal universities.

The results of a recent survey show that students and professors from the ILRE are facing difficulties on a daily basis in developing this decolonial approach to rural education. One of the difficulties is the lack of adequate facilities – primarily student accommodation and canteen – on the Santo Antônio de Pádua Campus for promoting access to and permanence at the university among rural students, resulting in increased dropout rates and meaning that students from indigenous villages, *Quilombos*, and other remote areas become

increasingly detached from the university. Another difficulty faced by the course's academic community is the monoculture of knowledge. The prevailing logic of knowledge production is colonial, which has little dialogue with the concept of production of *experience* based on non-Western epistemologies. The monoculture of knowledge means that the university itself has trouble fully understanding Pedagogy of Alternation and, consequently, the time of the community; or, in other words, the importance of the time of the community for rural education as a *decolonial* emancipatory proposal to destabilize colonial epistemological oppression and subalternization.

Despite the difficulties faced by the academic community, the study findings show the importance of the time of the community as a space for building and strengthening autonomy, participation, and collaboration on various social fronts, including the mobilization of social movements that has avoided the closure of rural schools in the region. These elements reveal the potential of the time of the community for promoting and committing to shared responsibilities in defense of specific educational rights for rural communities. An example of this potential is the union between the students and professors of the UFF, local community,

and school staff, preventing the closure of Alice do Amaral Peixoto Municipal School, located in the rural area of Santo Antônio de Pádua. All the above aspects may be considered *decolonial* pedagogical elements identified during the construction of the course.

In addition, the findings highlight that the time of the community is a "*provocateur*" of emancipatory political tensions, since developing a close relationship, ties of affection and friendship, and the social experience constructed with communities inspire other social actors to rise up against acts of violences and the denial of rights. The finding also illustrate the contribution of the time of the community within processes of transformation in which the power of action-reflection in social practices in the geographical and epistemological territories of rural education trigger actions that strengthen citizenship and the organization of social struggles. Considering all these elements that permeate the educational practice of Pedagogy of Alternation – inscribed and experienced in the time of the community – we pay reverence to the social struggles of rural education movements for having built an inclusionary educational proposal that encompasses different knowledges, subjects, and territorialities. In this

inclusion, the symbolic meaning of the time of the community, thought from the construction of the experience in this study, reveals its fundamental feature: the struggle for rural education in the *decolonial turn*.

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[1] Text produced based on a study conducted in the time of the community – June 2019.

[2] In Brazil, a licentiate degree (or *licenciatura*) is distinct from the British or American Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science, as it requires students to take more credits to allow them to teach in primary and secondary education.


[3] Data provided by the Academic Secretary - IDUFF System (2019).


[4] Further details on community mobilization against the closure of rural schools can be found in: Neves, L. C. *et al.* (2019). Memória social e resistência: organização comunitária contra o fechamento da Escola Alice do Amaral Peixoto. In: Costa, A. D. (Org.), *Cultura, cidadania e políticas públicas 4* (pp. 130-137). Ponta Grossa (PR): Atena Editora.


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